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JANICE ROBINSON

H. D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet

514pp. Scolar Press. £12.50.

085967 6692

Almost sixty years separate H. D.'s first *Collected Poems* (1925) from *Collected Poems 1912-1944*, edited with an introduction by Louis Martz, published last year in America, and now issued in England by Carcanet. It remains tantalizingly incomplete, awaiting the companion volume encompassing what Barbara Guest calls "the prolific years of . . . her most significant works". Martz's collection concludes firmly with H. D.'s war-time sequence, "Trilogy", which, in another perspective, inaugurated H. D.'s most productive period. The self-limitation of this volume is eminently rational. As it is, it runs to over six hundred pages and besides making the whole body of H. D.'s lyric poetry at last available, corrects a long-standing but distorted view of her development.

H. D. had seemed to be a poet of pristine beginnings and of oracular endings. What seemed to be lacking was any connecting middle period which confirmed an impression of her poetry as without human centre or historical substance. The large gap in the chronology of her published poetry reinforced this impression. She brought out no volume between 1931 and 1944, when "The Walls Do Not Fall", the first long sequence of what became *Trilogy*, appeared in booklet form.

H. D. had never quite lapsed from public notice. Poems appeared sporadically in *Poetry* and *Life and Letters Today*. More filtered through to the quartet in the 1950s and feminist periodicals in the 1960s. Now Martz has gathered together this scattered and unpublished material in the longest section of *The Collected Poems* and in the process restored the full arc of H. D.'s development. In particular, he has reinstated H. D.'s projected volume, *A Dead Priestess Speaks*, adding poems that seem to belong to it, such as the meditation on Lawrence, "The Poet" and the fantasia on Freud, "The Master". Thus at last the dead priestess has been given voice; an act remarkably consonant with the hermeneutic preoccupations of H. D.'s later poetry. It proves that, however belatedly, writers sometimes get the scholarship they deserve.

A significant portion of *A Dead Priestess Speaks* coincides roughly with the aftermath of H. D.'s analysis with Freud in 1933 and 1934. The best known outcome is the magnificent *Tribute to Freud*, published in 1956, which though demonstrably not free from romantic embroidery, on any reading exhibits a strict underlying commitment to truth. Here H. D.'s narcissism encountered Freud's objective and benevolent gaze which returned it to a renewed, less alienated possession of its own subjectivity. But here too H. D. encountered history, not as a purely personal devastation, but in Vienna, in the precise shape of the swastika chalked on the pavement outside Freud's house on the Bergasse.

Freud helped H. D. to recover her personal history from the cycle of compulsive repetitions and sterile fixation. *Tribute to Freud* itself bears witness to this regeneration, steeped as it is with memories of her childhood, her Moravian upbringing, the astronomer father she left behind on the New York quay in 1911. Freud also encouraged her to work through the period of her involvement with Richard Aldington, D. H. Lawrence and Cecil Gray - the latter, the one man of her many men she seemed not to have loved much and who, ironically, became the father of her child, Perdita. Freud evidently felt the whole period was blocked and urged her to rewrite it as history. The fact that Freud in preparation for his analysis with H. D. carefully read Lawrence's

cultural history. As far as H. D. was concerned, these various histories coincided in a task: "the cure will be, I fear me, writing that damn vol, straight, as history. . . ."

The "damn vol" finally took shape as her autobiographical novel, *Bid Me To Live*, not published until 1960 (H. D.'s writing career is typified by such indirections and delays) though much of it was composed in the 1930s. The novel represents a moment of fusion between various kinds of history, epichal and personal; it coincides with a psychoanalytical cure and is part of the evidence for its effectiveness. The restoration of *A Dead Priestess Speaks* is an equivalent in H. D.'s poetic evolution of that "bridge" constructed by psychoanalysis between her blocked history and her creative future.

It would be too much to say that H. D.'s "Dead Priestess" sequence issues wholly out of the analysis. The voice is still recognizably H. D.'s, rapt, intense and tangleless idiosyncrasy; she still retained the mask of the Pythoness, still chanting, even though the incantation becomes infected with doubts, hesitations, self-questioning. There seems to be a shift from supplication and exclamation to a more interrogative mode which one would like to think owes something to analytic exchange. The greater tentativeness is matched with a tenderness, which stops just short of human warmth, as if fearful of intrusion. This is especially noticeable in "The Poet", her poem about



H. D. in the 1920s, from Barbara Guest's *Herself Defined*, reviewed here.

Lawrence, evidently a central protagonist in the sessions with Freud:

No, I don't pretend, in a way, to understand . . . I say, "I don't grasp his philosophy, and I don't understand," but I put out a hand, touch a cold door, (we have both come from so far); I touch something imperishable; I think, why should he stay there, why should he guard a shrine so alone, no apart, on a path that leads nowhere?

The beauty of such a passage depends on the finest possible tact in the organizing of syntax, the flicker of rhyme ("cold door", "so far"), an almost weightless equivalence of phrasing ("I say", "I think") and an extremely reticent scheme of imagery which plays off tactile gestures against terms implying both motion and arrest (so "understand" can attach its abstraction to the concrete directness of "guard"). The passage gains in poignancy when set against the incident in *Bid Me To Live*, where the H. D. figure touches the Lawrence figure's sleeve:

She put out her hand. Her hand touched his sleeve. He shivered, he seemed to move back, move away like a hurt animal . . . only a touch on his arm made him shiver away . . . even this touch (not heavy on his sleeve) seemed to send some sort of repulsion through him. She drew back her hand.

The wound of this rejection became one in a series of rejections (by Pound, Aldington, Cecil Gray): H. D. is positive in *Bid Me To Live* that "I was not she who had started out to lure him, I was himself with his letters and last night his own reason for this rejection."

The transaction with Lawrence is finally culminated only in the late epic-sequence, *Helen in Egypt*, completed in 1954, but not published until the year of H. D.'s death in 1961. "The Poet", like the other poems of "A Dead Priestess" sequence, prepares the ground for the later poetry in its evocation of a human world more complex and qualified by history than the archaic purities and dislocated passions of the imagist phase.

Martz's other major addition to the H. D. canon consists in the restoration to their original form of the triad of poems dating from 1916, titled "Amaranth", "Eros" and "Envy". Those painful and painfully explicit lyrics flamed out of the failure of H. D.'s marriage to Richard Aldington. She fought hard to keep

What makes such simplicity haunting is the austerity of its opposition of "bitter" and "sweet", played against the fugitive rhymes of "bitter", "wish it" and "favourite". The choice of that last word is itself a triumph of tact. H. D. characteristically hits her note with absolute precision.

This *Collected Poems* marks a decisive moment in the posthumous recovery of H. D.'s reputation as a major figure in the Modernist movement, with an achieved body of work that can stand comparison with that of Eliot, Pound, Stevens and Williams. She has become, too, an exemplary figure for feminist criticism. Here battle has been joined around the issue of her bisexuality and how far her analysis with Freud liberated her language from the dominance of sexual stereotypes. Meanwhile, the last two years have seen the publication of two major biographies. Barbara Guest's engaging and fluent study, *Herself Defined*, comes in the wake of the much more weighty interpretative biography, Janice Robinson's, *H. D., The Life and Work of an American Poet*. Guest's account of H. D. very much lives up to her subtitle, "The Poet and her World", tracing the network of her movements, milieux and relationships, describing the rooms she inhabited, the dresses she wore,

the sources of her finance. Guest takes a decidedly positive view of Bryher (Winifred Ellerman), H. D.'s long-standing woman friend and backer, faithful "Fido" to her "Cat", and writes with enthusiasm about Bryher's own life as a writer, patron of Jeyce and rescuer of Freud, and of her work in film and her connections with Pabst, Pudovkin and Fritz Lang, matters which Robinson only faintly touches on in a footnote. She documents some matters of which Reblson is either ignorant or chooses to pass over, such as H. D.'s abortion in a Berlin clinic.

Although a devotee, Guest is not, like Robinson, an adept, and in an almost novelistic way cannot resist the interest of Bryher, much more a character herself than H. D. She cannot always refrain from a little friendly sniping: "a lonely woman... surrounded by a court, it at times provincial and limited"; an artist unhindered "in her dutiful pursuit of herself"; "her rather large feet tended to skim the ground." Robinson's book, scrupulously annotated, is written from a much greater depth of sympathetic commitment to H. D. the writer and myth-maker. The outer circumstances of H. D.'s life are seen as much more integral to H. D.'s artistic preoccupations. She quotes more extensively from her letters and elabo-

rates with their assistance a more comprehensive commentary on such topics as the mutual influence of H. D. and D. H. Lawrence, the progress of Freud's analysis and the unpublished occult romances such as *The Sword Went Out to Sea*.

The comfortable thing to say at this point is that the two accounts complement each other. Unfortunately they conflict in a number of important ways. Sometimes, it is in matters of fact. Guest is emphatic that the Lawrences never saw H. D. after 1918; Robinson documents a meeting at the house of Dorothy Richardson in 1926. Sometimes it concerns the quality of H. D.'s unpublished writing. Reblson treats *The Sword Went Out to Sea* as a valuable contribution to our understanding of H. D.'s late period; for Guest - "nearly impossible to decipher, it is an upsetting book as everywhere there is evidence of a disturbed consciousness". Robinson is convinced that H. D. had an affair with Lawrence which was the basis for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and will not accept H. D.'s explicit denial, of which, *pace* Martz, she appears to be perfectly aware, because it was made in a letter to Bryher - and Robinson believes that H. D. consistently misinformed Bryher about the nature of her relationship to Lawrence.

Finally, there is the question of H. D.'s breakdown in 1946. For Guest, Bryher is once more the hero of a rescue operation which repeats that of 1919; in that year she saved H. D.'s life when she nearly died of pneumonia. "She seized a charter plane and flew H. D. to clinic in Zurich." The next chapter describes H. D. as having "risen... from a breakdown so serious as to have required electric shock treatment". In Robinson's version, "she was hospitalized forcibly, at Bryher's direction". Bryher and Schmidberg "actually kidnapped her and imprisoned her at Seeböf". Against what Guest represents as the entirely benevolent régime of the clinic, Robinson tells us that H. D. "told Bryher that her problems had been exacerbated by injections...". Further, Robinson quotes H. D. as writing to Bryher, "I was never really afraid, until that 'shock treatment', then I was so damned mad, I sort of got well." (Mad presumably in its American, not British sense.) And in conclusion: "After H. D. wrote some very angry and cogent letters that also expressed great gratitude to Bryher, Bryher saw to it that she was released." It is puzzling that Guest never mentions Robinson's book, though her bibliography lists the American issue of Martz's *Collected Poems* which cites Janice Robinson's study.

The poet of the living dead

Michael Hofmann

FRANK GRAZIANO (Editor)
Georg Trakl: A Profile
127pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £6.95.
085635 479 1
RICHARD DETSCH
Georg Trakl's Poetry: Toward a Union of Opposites
148pp. Pennsylvania State University Press.
£14.40.
0 271 00343 X

If the non-specialist reader knows anything about Georg Trakl, he probably knows about his death: a drug overdose after the battle of Grodek in 1914. And if he knows anything of his life, it may well fit into the few words, "Drugs Alcohol Little Sister", of the title of a poem by John Berryman. The impression is of a "typically Germanic" mixture of bleakness and luridness; a frail, self-imperilled, insatiable nature; and a poetry dwelling obsessively on death and decay, narrowly and culpably pathognomic.

It is the Germans who make a virtue of efficiency and diligence (*Tüchtigkeit*); yet its opposite, an almost total inability to live (*Lebensunfähigkeit*), is even harder for the more accommodating English to accept: especially when it is allied, as it is with Trakl, to an unwavering seriousness and unknown depths of feeling, of belief, of psychosis. Trakl once threatened to kill himself unless he was given credit by a sweet-shop owner. The same complicated helplessness is displayed throughout his life. As a small boy, he walked into a pond until only his hat remained visible above the surface. At seventeen he was found by his family, lying on a sofa, in a chloroform-induced black-out. It seems likely that he committed incest with his sister Gretl, and internal evidence from the poems suggests that his mother caught them in the act. In later life, he tried repeatedly to find work and live normally, but his attempts lasted mostly just for a few days. Even in his own ominously chosen profession of pharmacist, it is reported, his fear of the customers made him sweat through six shirts in a morning. When in 1914 he found an anonymous patron (in Wittgenstein), he was quite unable to go to the bank and pick up his money.

Physical impressions of Trakl centre on the frozen rigidity of his features, his quiet, monotonous voice, and the evil, metallic, criminal glitter of his eyes - "Funkeind-Böse", as even his late, close friend, Ludwig von Ficker, the editor of *Der Brenner*, conceded. There is something wolfish about Trakl's face - malice, avidity, suddenness, contempt - and his poems contain several such self-identifications: "Aed be passed his days in a dark pit, lied and stole and bid himself - a flaming wolf - from the white face of his mother" ("Dream and Derangement") and in "Passion" it is between wolves that a suggested incest occurs:

Zwei Wölfe im finsternen Wald
Machten wir unser Blut in steinerner Umarmung
Und die Sterne unseres Geschlechts fielen auf uns.
(Two wolves in the dark wood
We mingled our blood to a stone embrace
And the stars of our breed fell on us.)

In Michael Hamburger's Introduction to *Georg Trakl: A Profile*, this dangerous and alien figure is domesticated until he seems to be just another black sheep of German literature, under Hamburger's tutelary crook. Hamburger's is a dignified, withdrawn, almost Olympian performance in which he denies that biographical inferences can be drawn from the poems, and claims that "Trakl's dominant aspiration was to lose himself". This may well be so, but surely the aspiration of his readers is to find him among the constant recurrences of figures and scenes, their compulsive reappearances and variations? To refuse to countenance incest is, if nothing else, unprofitable: the Trakl-critic Walther Kilty, quoted in Richard Detsch's *Georg Trakl's Poetry: Towards a Union of Opposites*, sees incest as "die stellvertretende ererbte Unordnung... die zur großen metaphysischen geistlichen Unruhe wird" ("a representative affliction... which develops into a grand, metaphysical disorder"). And Detsch's own close reading of a handful of poems, with the added witness of Heidegger,

Jung, Nevalis, Goethe and others, succeeds in making compelling sense of what, without such a reading, would remain vague, random and imponderable.

With the help of early drafts - Trakl constantly rewrote his own poems, often cutting them down by two-thirds or mere - Detsch is able to clarify the "intermingling of roles", and produce a satisfying account of the difficult late poem "Passion": an adumbrated movement from "incest - the bey and his sister", to "death - Orpheus and Eurydice", to "expiation and transformation - Christ and the penitent woman". Detsch then produces accounts of alchemical writings analysed by Jung, and finds that they have in common with Trakl "the production of a unisexual being who is both the effluvia of the incestuous pair and the result of their own fusion into one person, their own achievement of wholeness". (The phrase, "ein Geschlecht", both "one sex" and "one kin", in "abendländisches Lied", is, he notes, the only use of italic emphasis in all of Trakl's writing.) This being in turn is the dead or unborn child who occurs frequently in Trakl; it is Elis ("G Elis, how long you have been dead"). It is a conductor of dead souls, a psychopomp: "As in 'Passion', almost all of Trakl's human figures seem to be dead and yet continue to act as though they were alive in some way. His is the poetry of the living dead."

This is hard, heady stuff, but not the less true for that. Nor are its conclusions all that different from Hamburger's; for instance, that the dead are "more vivid, more full of life than the living", or that a poem is "an allegory of the relation between innocence and death". The main difference is that Detsch gives a detailed and credible account of how such conclusions were reached. This difference is most plainly demonstrated in his excellent chapter on "Trakl's Symbolic Style", and the almost incredible proliferation of uncertainty in Trakl's work: the use of verbs to blur contours; the "frequent impersonalization of human figures through the nominal use of indefinite neuter singular adjectives"; the juxtaposition of unrelated observations, so that a poem of four quatrains can - and does - consist of sixteen unconnected sentences; the "absolute use of metaphors", in which there is no basis for comparison; the disconcerting use of the words "perhaps", "or" and "but". Against this, Hamburger advances the sentence, "Trakl's ambiguities are not deliberate or cerebral." Possibly not, but they are absolutely pervasive. Richard Detsch's idea that they further the cause of unity by eroding concreteness and individuation seems just, and it is only one of many such ideas in a clever, sympathetic study.

By contrast, *Georg Trakl: A Profile* is a disappointing book. The bulk of it was published by Cape in 1968, as *Selected Poems*, with a parallel text. This has now had one poem, "Music in the Mirabel", added to it, and Michael Hamburger's "Dejection" comes in for Robert Grenier's "Melancholy". Christopher Middleton's blunder in "Western Song", "G the ancient sound of the little home" (for "Heimchen", a cricket) has been corrected (but then, in the newly added "Music in the Mirabel", Michael Hamburger has "misread" "Feuerschein" as "Feuerstein", giving him "A flint lights up inside the room"; or perhaps our editions are different). Firmly on the debit side is the fact that the originals are not reprinted. Trakl is a bad loss, because, as Hamburger admits in his Introduction, "Trakl's long lines do not translate well into English", because English lacks the inflections of German, and because "Trakl's adjectives carry much more weight than English usage allows". He might have added, I think, that the generalizing latinity of English is a disadvantage; for "schwerze Verwesung" there is "black corruption", for "herbstliche Trübsinn" there is "autumnal reverie" and for "Untergang" the reversible "Decline". The translations are rarely better than lame trots, with a paucity of rhythmic excitement, so absence of grace and clarity in the phrasing, a loss of the unique, echo-less tone of the originals. They are cautious and inhibited, acting under duress. "Trumpets" is a success, and there are vivid passages in "Childhood" and "Hellian", but sporadic sounding phrasing is conspicuously rare - like this line of Middleton's "To One Who Died Young": "You walk and talk together under

elms by the green riverside." The appendix of five translations by an American poet, the late James Wright, is a lesson to the others in its naturalness.

In the farmyard the white moon of autumn shines. Fantastic shadows fall from the eaves of the roof. A silence is lying in the empty windows; Now from it the rats emerge softly And skitter here and there, squeaking. Compare this to Grenier's version: In the courtyard the autumn moon shines white. From the roof's edge wild shadows drop. A silence lives in empty windows, Easily up into which leap the rats And fill hissing here and there - surely a different approach might have been tried out in the sixteen years since *Selected Poems*? One stumbles through these, with little pleasure for the most part, only - *pace* Hamburger - briefly electrified by the many occurrences of the word "sister".

The rest of this *Profile* is made up of Trakl's prose-poems and a selection from his letters, with a commentary. Here, the matter of translation becomes quite grave. Agreed, Trakl is one of the most difficult of authors, but surely Frank Graziano (or someone) should have cast an eye over these versions. Rodenck Iverson, the translator of the prose-poems, has a cavalier way with articles and with singulars and plurals that is generally at variance with the original; his "Dream and Derangement" misses out two whole sentences; he renders "Gestalt" by "complex" or "complexity" ("his own bloody complexity rose before him, towering stiffly from the rubbish" instead of "he saw his own bleeding form, stiff with rubbish"). Sometimes, Iverson just has no idea of the meaning and makes an impressionistic guess: "he raped the quiet child, and, reflected in the afterglow, saw that profound darkness, his own face". What Trakl wrote is "in her beaming face he recognized his own deranged features": it is a family resemblance, not a

mystical "afterglow". As well as countless inelegances and approximations, there are a score of serious mistakes. With the letters, the problem is slightly different: neither translations nor commentary, both by Siegfried Mandel, quite succeed in making the break with German. The whole section is informed by a kind of grimly resolute pretentiousness and enthusiasm that can do Trakl no good at all, with their talk of images "wrought in his inner smithy" and the like.

This publication, of which much might have been expected, and on which much depends, is inept, contradictory and discreditable. Michael Hamburger's coolly abstemious introduction is opposed by the printing of a picture of Gretl, by the experience of reading the poems and by Mandel's talk of Trakl's "succumbing to tabus". It is a pity that valuable work like that of Richard Detsch should thus be isolated still further from a community of interested and informed readers. To say nothing of Trakl himself, whose cold, unrelenting, unhuman speech, with its small, select and poisoned vocabulary, is like no other in German, let alone English. It has been called visionary, and indeed, one of the translators has mistakenly put "visionary" for "Schauender", but it is realism, albeit of a reality that has yet to come into being.

Dornige Wildnis umgibt die Stadt.
Von blutenden Stufen jagt der Mond
Die erschrockenen Frauen.
Wilde Wölfe brachen durchs Tor.

(Thorny wilderness girdles the town about.
From bloody doorsteps the moon
Chases terrified women.
Wild wolves have poured through the gates.)

The *Unknown Rilke* includes the sequence *The Life of Mary* and selections from Rilke's early and late poems, in a translation by Franz Wright (141pp. Oberlin, Ohio: Field Translation Series. Paperback, \$6.50. 0 932440 15 0).

Following Pound around

Humphrey Carpenter

E. FULLER TORREY
The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St Elizabeth's
339pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £12.95 (paperback, £8.95).
0283 99084 8
DANIEL HOFFMAN (Editor)
Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams: The University of Pennsylvania Conference Papers 247pp. University of Pennsylvania Press. £23.40.
08122 78925

Dr Fuller Torrey, an American psychiatrist, was impelled to write his book largely because he found himself following Ezra Pound around. "I grew up in the town where he went to college, helped build a road through his grandmother's homestead in Nine Mile Swamp, and as a student focused on the work of his protégé T. S. Eliot. Two decades later I began work in the asylum he had called home for over twelve years." This seems about as good a reason for studying Pound as T. S. Matthews's confession that he wanted to write a life of Eliot because he had the same initials. On the other hand Torrey did work at St Elizabeth's (as recent Poundians spell it; I note that Torrey or his publishers prefer "St Elizabeth's"), the Washington mental asylum where Pound was incarcerated after his trial for treason was stopped because of an insanity plea. Moreover, through the United States Freedom of Information legislation, Torrey has had access not merely to hospital records, but also to government papers relating to the case. One therefore turns to his book in the hope that it will shed some light on Pound's state of mind during the most important crisis of his life.

Unfortunately, Torrey has decided to pre-judge the case before he begins to examine the evidence. "The biggest myth", he tells us of Pound at the outset, "was that he was insane." No one acquainted with the *Pisan Cantos*, written at the very moment at which Pound (according to his defence lawyer) was supposed to be "mentally unfit", can seriously doubt that the insanity plea was decided upon simply to save Pound from possible execution as a traitor because of his Rome broadcasts in support of Mussolini. But Torrey, having dismissed the case for insanity at the outset, substitutes accusations of his own, and devotes the first part of his book to alleging that Pound, though not mad, was a charlatan and a fool.

He has certainly done his research into the early part of Pound's life very thoroughly - almost more thoroughly than he has researched the St Elizabeth's years - and has unearthed some small gems from items of Pound's correspondence that have been pub-

lished. But he is quite lacking in insight. He tries to convince us that the strongest bond between Pound and Yeats was a shared interest in the occult, and in doing so ignores and distorts nine-tenths of what we know about that friendship. He treats the great Gaudier-Brzeska "Hieratic Head" of Pound as if it were merely a phallic joke by the sculptor and the poet, and ridicules "most Pound scholars" for accepting it as a piece of serious art. He cites the short poem "Frater Minores" (printed in the first *Blasphemy*) as the product of Pound's supposed belief "that coitus was the royal road to wisdom" - whereas the poem in fact attacks those who would like to hold that belief. He adopts a consistently putting-down tone: Pound "by the late 1920s... was a semiof-forgotten poet"; "Nobody paid much attention to him." *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* are scarcely mentioned, and those who admire the *Cantos* are condemned for approving "obscurest of his own sake". In view of all this, it is a little difficult to see why the "conspiracy of Harvard poets" (Eliot, Mac-

leish, et al), whom Torrey believes to have ganged up to save Pound from execution as a traitor, should have bothered to do so.

So Pound arrives at St Elizabeth's, in Torrey's narrative, condemned not by a court of law, but by Torrey's own contempt for him. At this point Torrey's attack turns on Dr Winifred Overholser, the supervising psychiatrist at St Elizabeth's, whom Torrey virtually accuses of cooking the books over Pound - Overholser was an admirer of Pound's writings, was keen to save him from trial, and therefore made sure the hospital closed ranks over the Pound case and over admitted to the outside world that the man was quite sane. This may well be true; but again Torrey puts his case in so one-sided a fashion that one is left with doubts. To support his arguments he cites psychiatric reports on Pound - or rather the absence of such reports, for Overholser allegedly made sure that nothing went into hospital records that might endanger Pound's safety by questioning his insanity.

Torrey's book is certainly not without value.

It adds a good deal of material to the Pound biographical canon, and it will have to be cited in any future discussion of Pound's sanity. But Torrey never tackles such basic questions as the relation of poetry to sanity generally (it seems to know nothing of Smart, Cowper, Clare or Robert Lowell), and his book never lives up to its title, for he makes no serious attempt to explore the "roots" of Pound's fascism. The Ezra Pound of his book is just a naughty boy, a school bully.

The Pound of the symposium edited by Daniel Hoffman looks at times more like a figure in a shrine, and there is a smell of the sanctuary lamp about some of these Conference Papers first delivered at the University of Pennsylvania. The conference, a one-day affair held in 1981 to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Pound and William Carlos Williams receiving their degrees there, was held by Poundians for Poundians, and there is no Torrey in their ranks. But the papers are far from being merely adulatory. Hugh Kenner supplies a fizzy starter which suggests that the make-up of the *Cantos* owes something to the heterogeneous nature of the American university curriculum; he also Pound's freshman course: English Composition, Public Speaking, Algebra, German Grammar, American Colonial History, the Principles of Government in the United States and Latin. "A kind of functional mapping is feasible between such curricula and the poetry Pound and Eliot wrote", says Kenner, and he goes on to suggest that the genesis of the Poundian approach, and of *The Waste Land*, may partly lie also in the scribbles left on a college blackboard at the end of a busy day, after it has been used for a number of different subjects.

A main course in the symposium is provided by Wendy Stallard Flory, who does her best to tackle head-on one of the questions ignored by Torrey: why did Pound become antisemitic, and what kind of antisemitism did he preach? There are also some gleanings from letters sent by Pound and Williams to James Laughlin, Pound's genial, long-suffering publisher. Laughlin reveals that he once tried to put a clause in Pound's contract that there was to be no antisemitism in the *Cantos*; he got the reply: "Is the Divina Commedia propaganda or NOT?" The gub'r can NOT expect to control the religion and philosophy of his authors / certain evil habits of language etc. must be weighed / and probably will be found wanting." More revealing, perhaps, is Pound's admission to Laughlin in 1960 that he had sometimes been guilty of "violent language" defensible, and not intended for publication even when written privately. Also intended in some cases to be taken ungraciously, Torrey knew when to take Pound ungraciously. Torrey's book might have been better had he learnt to do so too.

BLAKE MORRISON

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JEAN-PIERRE CAUVIN and MARY ANN CAWS
Poems of André Breton: A bilingual anthology
260pp. University of Texas Press. £20.65
(paperback, £9.75).
0292 764766

Towards the end of his life, André Breton published a tiny book as his poetic testament. *Le Livre* (1961) consists simply of four enigmatic sentences which popped into Breton's mind while he was on the verge of sleep. Such samples of pre-conscious language are presented as touchstones of the poetic, inasmuch as they spring unmediated from the source and stimulate the incantatory process of surrealist automatism. These four brief phrases from the 1950s are the direct descendants of that celebrated dream-phrase of 1919 which first made Breton think about doing automatic writing: "Il y a un homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre".

What can now be seen as Breton's lifelong commitment to the principle of automatism or subliminal inspiration has been the locus of a

series of misunderstandings and unjustified accusations. To refute some of the charges, it should simply be said: no, Breton didn't *only* write in an automatic manner; no, he didn't place unintelligibility above meaningfulness; no, he didn't sabotage beauty to protect a rigid ideological principle.

What Breton did do, as Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws's anthology amply demonstrates, was to explore language throughout his career in the light of a precept of unconstrained expression inseparable from the essentially ethical position in which the whole project of Surrealism is predicated. The automatic message floating into consciousness is nothing less than a signal from that reservoir of primal spontaneity which is the hidden or libidinal self in all its fertility. Breton's "man sliced in two" is the surrealist seeking to unite the two aspects of his being, the unconscious and the conscious, instinct and intelligence. Surrealist art in all its forms is an attempt to release the dormant savage within – but equally to reconcile him with the civilized man living with his eyes open to the real world.

Breton therefore prized the dream-utterance not because it was marvellously unintelligible, but because it was nonsense in transition towards sense – a form of language which epitomizes the expressive act as the passage from the shadows of inarticulacy to the light of communication and understanding. Again and again in his poems, Breton turns the filler of his "phantom vessel" over to the obscure hand of automatism. Again and again, sense veers towards the rocks of meaningfulness; and yet it is out of this repeated veering that Breton is able to discover the shapes of a new meaning, mapping the precise outline of each island in

the hitherto uncharted archipelago of emotion and intuition.

Flamboyant and disquieting images are, of course, the best-known features of Breton's poetic style, and this volume offers a ready selection of those "free unions" of discrepant realities which he so cherished as disruptive of mental fixities. The "vertebral sphinx", the "glass-teethed wolf" and the "algebra-nostalgic heresies" are so many experimental species spawned in defiance of what seems reasonable.

More importantly, though, such images need to be read in context, as flashes or sparks in a dynamic of provocations. And, as Breton grew to understand the implications of his poetics, he tended more and more to relinquish arbitrary shock effects and to develop a grand style of long, oracular lines which set up a momentum below the flickering figures of the surface, stimulating an alertness to analogy and compatibility that goes beyond the bounds of prosaic literalness. This is utopian poetry on the Rimbaudian model, one that announces a new harmony lying on the far side of "present appearances".

Some readers of Breton's work will find his approach simply irritating. It is true that he has a penchant for flappdoodle. "It seems that the statue near which the wormwood of my nerve endings / Arrives at its destination is tuned every night like a piano" is a statement long on mischievous incongruity but rather short on lyrical resonance. On the other hand, Breton's insistent word-spinning (often enhanced by the ritualistic insertion of rare words) can also summon the attentive – or acquiescent – reader to encounter something magnetizing and poignant, a convincing "presence" within the ver-

bal concatenation. This occurs most often in his queerly de-centred effusions of sexual desire.

Je caresse tout ce qui fut toi
Dans tout ce qui doit l'être encore
L'écoute siffler mélodieusement
Tes bras innombrables
Serpent unique dans tous les arbres
("I caress all that was you / In all that shall still be you / I can hear the melodious whistling / Of your numberless arms / Snake unique amid all the trees".)

There are, in fact, moments of true poetic revelation lying in wait in Breton's most unsettled texts. Perhaps his most assured longer poem is "Fata Morgane", which he composed in Marseille in 1940, on the verge of exile; the poem employs an authoritative blend of automatism and willed structure that successfully mimes the attitudes of a mind hovering between anxiety and wisdom, puzzlement and discernment. Here lies Breton's achievement as a poet: he brings his reader into touch with the raw energy of words as they flow and cohere, to produce, image by image, a constellation of intuitively focused meanings and insights which allow him to glide over local incongruities.

This anthology supersedes previous selections in its generous sweep across the whole body of Breton's verse. Unfortunately, though backed by useful notes which clarify Breton's double meanings, the English renderings are somewhat word-for-word, and rarely attempt rhythms suitable for reading aloud, as did Kenneth White's versions published in 1969. A slight awkwardness, however, may be in keeping with the English reader's initial perception of Breton's surface irregularities.

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The minims of language

Hugh Kenner

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
Selected Poems
Edited by Charles Tomlinson
272pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.95.
0140421904
Paterson
246pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.95.
0140423168

First, a note of envy: Penguin's is the Selected Williams I wish my students could buy. Alas, copyright laws. "Except in the United States of America", runs the legalese. In the US we must make do with a *Selected Poems* haphazardly compiled as long ago as 1949, and prefaced by a man (Randall Jarrell) both radically out of sympathy with his poet and unskilled at concealing that fact. Williams's best reader on either side of the Atlantic has been a Briton, Charles Tomlinson, the editor of the Penguin: whereby hangs an intricate tale.

The Penguin *Selected* was first published in 1976, let lapse, then reprinted all of seven years later. Whoever neglects to buy it now may not have another chance until 1990 or later. Such interminables play their part in making literary history difficult to grasp. It's hard to believe in the worth of a book you can't reach for. And William Carlos Williams has been dead now for twenty-one years. He began publishing some seventy years ago. Why such dragging of British feet?

Publishers make marketing judgments, and British ones may well have hung back from Williams on the principle that sales would be minimal. Still, when Tomlinson, in a poem many years ago, addressed the improbability of ever seeing W. C. Williams published by Faber, he hadn't sales in mind. He had in mind the time a Faber director, the late T. S. Eliot, had dismissed Williams as "of some local interest, perhaps". And that would have been a reason for sales to be minimal. There was a time when Eliot could write numerous reviews

without lifting a pen.

Hence one complication: Williams, the counter in an Eliotic game. Eliot had striven for a mid-Atlantic style, not to be identified as either American or British. Even Henry James, with "a mind so fine no idea could violate it", had admitted perhaps one Americanism per sentence, not blemishing his pages with "ain't" and "gimme" but assuming transatlantic nuances in words that look neutral. "That was the real way to work things out" is a Jamesian sentence that employs an un-English shading of "real". Williams went much further, exulting in what he came to call "the American idiom", something identifiably local, backyard-local. It was everything Eliot felt he had put behind him in acquiring ("by great labour") a Tradition, something that (he told us) "cannot be inherited". Tom (Missouri) Eliot, the Possum would playfully sign himself, as though to remark the distance he'd come from St Louis. And Williams claimed to be making poetry of what Eliot had put behind him when he let the Garrick Club supersede Missouli.

Tradition will validate your poetry with half-hearted echoes of half-remembered poems. As early as "Purloin", the Eliot of

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats . . .

was letting his pentameter-trimeter rhyming draw authority from "Lyctides":

The white Pink, and the Pansy freak with jet,
The glowing Violet . . .

But "words hung with pleasing wraiths of former masteries" were abhorrent to Williams. That way, in his judgment, lay poetic death. Life was opportunism, alert. The poet's ear needed testing on the minims of language: on the tricky irregular sounds of living speech.

"Purloin" illustrates what was until a lifetime ago a working definition of American poetry: English poetry that had chanced to get written somewhere else. (Whitman? Oh, yes, Whitman; what an eccentric.) Anything written in the English language presupposed the

English tradition by default. But by 1910 English was becoming, for complex reasons, the language of International Modernism. (Why it wasn't French is a theme for an unwritten book.) In 1922 *Ulysses* was published – in France – in "English", and it proved not to be assimilable by the traditions of the English novel, a genre from which Dr Leavis was quite right to exclude it. "All the conventions of organized prose which have grown with our race", Holbrook Jackson for one complained, "have been cast aside as so much dross." The key phrase is "our race". No longer would the norms of English usage be accountable to the customs of one people on one island.

Along with International Modernism, we can now distinguish at least three regional literatures, Irish, American and British. Seamus Heaney has recently cited, in connection with early verses by Yeats, the old poet's opposition between minds that remember the Thames valley with its mildness, and his own need to have things "knit by dramatic tension": almost as though two literatures stemmed from two weathers or two geographies, as William Carlos Williams would have said they did. The Yeats of 1887 –

A little boy inside the sycamore wood
Followed a ringdove's ash-grey gleam of feather.
Noon wraps the trees in volts of violet weather,
And on tiptoe the winds a-whispering stood . . .

was trying to be an English poet. The Yeats of 1914, crying

Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn . . .

has negated the English associations of "cold" and declared his allegiance to Connemara stones. "Cold" is a test-word, a key word even in his epitaph: a word for the kind of poem he extols and for the kind of eye he'd have us cast. The Thames-valley word for either of these would be "warm". Yet Yeats and the poets of England could have dined the same dictionary. Dictionaries do not record the ranges of asso-

ciation from which poets make poetry. Yeats's "cold" looks like Keats's "cold" but is not the same word. "The owl, for all his feathers, was no-cold": there "The Eve of St Agnes" does homage to "poor Tom's a-cold" and to the heritage of a race.

It is not misleading to call William Carlos Williams the American Yeats, even to Yeats's eagerness for theory, though without the spooks and gyres. Like Yeats, though less ably, he commenced in imitation of sanctified models; he had a long Keats Period in which he was unreadable. And like Yeats, he swerved suddenly away to something utterly idiosyncratic, validated, he said, by the usages of his native New Jersey, usages at least as authentic as any you'll hear in Sligo.

Rather observe that it is early morning than that the sky is smooth as a turquoise – so, about 1917, he admonishes "a solitary disciple". And at about the same time, in a poem titled "Pastoral", we find him admiring the houses of the very poor: roof out of line with sides, the yard cluttered with old chicken wire, ashes, furniture gone wrong;

– no Keatsian words in any of that, though its savouring of knotted consonantal events – "cluttered", "chicken wire", "ashes" – is remotely referable to Keats ("To swell the gourd, end plump the hazel-shells") and resists Swinburnian modulation.

He wrote poems to be looked at, and at the same time to be spoken and heard. They need a tense, urgent voice, greeting line after line with astonishment. That is so un-English that with the best will in the world many English ears cannot hear Williams. Read with English inflexions, his cadences go awry, and the skill of letting lineation guide voice to approximate American inflexions seems not to be widely possessed. Lineation – what constitutes a line –

Paradise and exile

Lino Pertile

SALVATORE QUASIMODO
Complete Poems
Translated by Jack Bevan
247pp. Anvil Press. £10 (paperback, £5.95).
0856460931

When in 1959 Salvatore Quasimodo was awarded the Nobel Prize for poetry, the Italian literary world was taken by surprise. There was delight that Italian poetry had been internationally acknowledged, but also puzzlement, if not outright resentment, about the Academy's choice. Though Quasimodo ranked high, he was by no means the best Italy had to offer. The general consensus favoured Ungaretti and Montale; whose work was little known abroad, though uncontroversially acclaimed in Italy. The award was a snub to Italian literary critics and Quasimodo was made to suffer for it, until he died, aged sixty-one in 1968.

Now, twenty-five years on – after Montale's belated Nobel in 1975 – there are few who would still begrudge Quasimodo his Prize. However his reputation in Italy has, if anything, declined still further. In a recent and authoritative anthology of twentieth-century Italian poetry edited by P. V. Mengaldo, Quasimodo is allowed less room not only than Ungaretti and Montale, but also Cardarelli, Marin, Bertolucci, Betocchi, Gatto, Solmi, Luzi and other poets of his generation. Moreover, of the nine pieces which represent him, three are from his translations of the Greek lyric poets; published in 1940 and now recognized in Italy as his major achievement.

Quasimodo has been more fortunate abroad. This is due to certain qualities of his poetry but also, I suspect, to the kind of expectations that readers abroad have about Italy and Italian culture in general. With a Hellenic Sicily forever looming in the background of his verse, Quasimodo invites a reading that perpetuates that northern myth of an archaeological, downtrodden and wholly Mediterranean Italy, which the country has tried to live down ever since the end of the Second World War.

This is not, however, what Quasimodo's poetry is about. His work is normally, and justifiably, seen to fall into two distinct phases with the war providing a period of transition. Before the war Quasimodo pursued a poetry that was entirely devoid of historical content. It

was "pure poetry" of symbolist derivation; at its heart was the disembodied word with its magical power, *trobar clus*. With the war came a conversion, a realization that poetry had a duty to "re-make man". So history replaced myth, lament and invective replaced contemplation and the personal drama of the poet's voluntary exile from his native Sicily became the drama of historical mankind. But the resultant work, if more accessible – hence its success abroad – was also less personal and intense, and at times merely oratorical.

As can now be seen quite clearly in Jack Bevan's excellent translations, Quasimodo's early poetry relies on suggestion and evocation. This does not mean that the poet is disingenuous, nor that the artifice is coldly aimed at some preordained effect. The linguistic knot expresses a state of genuine emotional tension, which the poet is unable and unwilling to articulate in a rational manner. Nor is he concerned to clarify moral content. Indeed, even later, any quest of this nature seems to work against the grain of his poetry, as can be seen in much of his post-war "committed" work. Here his lexical range is extended, his imagery and themes are widened; a discourse begins to emerge that is unambiguous, but the commitment of the man to reason and clarity ends by making banal the intuitions of the poet. Quasimodo achieves his best results when he is relieved of the burden of content; when he can concentrate on the word itself.

This fascination with the word has some notable effects on his style. His syntax is weak and vague – few articles remain and the nouns resound in isolation. Often the titles of his poems carry no meaning; they are musical phrases which the poet extracts from the body of the poem – or is it the other way round? – where their semantic charge seems equally slight. (This procedure extends to the organization of the whole volume; since the title of each individual section is also that of one of its poems.) Quasimodo is in love with certain words, which come to make up the thematic texture of his poetry. Among them are those naming natural phenomena: water, sky, wind, night, shadow, sun, light, grass and tree. They are the numinous witnesses of a changeless landscape outside time and space. Thus his memory transforms his native Sicily into an enchanted island, a lost paradise more Hellenic than Italian. Conversely, Milan and northern Italy become a place of the past, a city which belongs

to the past, a symbol of all human loneliness and alienation. In fact it is a symbol without referent, Quasimodo's poetry, when at its best, is totally self-reflective.

Jack Bevan is undoubtedly well attuned to Quasimodo's music. After trying his hand in 1965 with a selection from the poetry, he offers a complete translation which is imaginative, and by and large, accurate. In a verse logue, addressed to Quasimodo, he writes: "Ancient telosmoo risen up from the dead, your race, speak / through my mouth, bring your life in my breath; / and if my own voice speaks, hurl your / gigantic boulders after me into the sea". It is an awesome challenge for translator to utter. And the fact that Bevan translates *Giaccio* (I lay) as "ice" (*Giaccio* Italian) surely would not justify Quasimodo returning from the dead to throw boulders out. That is the only error I have found in what is otherwise a faultless work of love. Of course there are cases where love blinds the linguist. For instance, when Quasimodo writes "Ora respiro una radice / esprime d'albero corpo io", he surely does not mean "I happily breathe on a root / from a rotted tree", but "A root rotted tree exhales a grateful breath". Again when Quasimodo writes "Un'eco di cosa della terra / al fardo strazio, amata", Bevan translates ("An echo of the earth you come us / in the slow torture, beloved") is not happy one: what the poet means is perhaps something more like: "When the list / torment comes, let an echo of the earth / loved, console us".

These are largely matters of interpretation, though, and Quasimodo's poetry is such that the translator cannot avoid becoming interpreter. In order to transmute into English the translator has to elicit ambiguous obscurities which are acceptable to the poetic language but not in English. He must therefore reconstitute Quasimodo's style even at the risk of trivializing what might be profound. Above all he has to tone down that kind of linguistic violence by which Quasimodo has placed words, rather than meaning, at the heart of his book. Jack Bevan performs these difficult tasks extremely well; his translations are often clearer than the originals, sometimes the price of knowing where he is. This is why, even with the most sensitive translation, it would seem essential to be provided with the original text.

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was his tireless obsession. He would type the same short sequence of words over and over, dividing it into lines differently, seeking out a visual notation for what he heard: for what musicians, not grammarians, call "phrasing". The results grow too intricate to codify, but one hint may be useful. American voices tend to give prepositions a rising inflexion. Williams tended to break lines at prepositions. These two facts are related, so much depends upon

— so begins his most famous (notorious?) poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow" of 1923, and you have to hit "upon" like a local climax to get the cadence working. That's natural to an American voice, forced to an English one. Many English readers don't perceive the nature of the effort they must make. It's not unlike the need to be alert for Chaucer's syllabic "e", neglect of which makes Chaucer seem quaint and fumbling.

Still, browsing will yield unstrained rewards. He published "A Sort of a Song" in 1944: Let the snake wait under his weed and the writing be of words, slow and quick, sharp to strike, quiet in wait, steepless.

— through metaphor to reconcile the people and the stones. Compose. (No ideas but in things) twen! Saxifrage is my flower that splits the rocks.

The assonances and alliterations of the first stanza are as intricate as you could wish: snake / wait; wait / weed / writing / words / wait; quick / strike; quick / quiet; sharp / strike / sleepless.

Gerard Hopkins might have been pleased. The second stanza shifts its base of attack from phonic weavings to audacities of diction: "to reconcile the people and the stones", the stones being the rocks split by "Saxifrage", exactly named. Embedded in this trope we find the little symmetry, Compose. (No ideas but in things) twen!

"Compose." is that equivalent to "invent"? Williams knew one word from another, and sundored those two. To "compose" is to pick up, as with the hands, prior to placing together. Pick up what? The "things" of his medial phrase; also pick up "words", here regarded as "things". And the way "compose" goes with "things", so "invent" goes with "ideas", in a pivotal chiasmus. There's a much formal invention in those forty-seven words. The snake, what has he to do with the saxifrage, save obliterate? He waits like it, the one to strike suddenly, the other to break up into showy five-petaled blossoms in good time; into, as it were, Williams poems.

And does the Saxifrage truly break rocks? Only, it seems, in its etymology. It does grow among rocks and up through the clofts of rocks. "No ideas but in things", says the poem, yet its climactic idea is a lexicographer's invention. Or examine the lineation. What is "sharp" doing at a line-end, separated from the rest of its phrase? Why not

slow and quick, sharp to strike, quiet to wait?

To find out, read the poem as Williams heard it, with a rising inflexion at "sharp". Repeat that inflexion, seven lines later, at "aplots". And who before this has hymned applots? Williams delighted in celebrating the "weeds" poetic diction disregards. "Flowers by the Sea".

When over the flowery, sharp pasture's edge, unseen, the tall poem

lifts its form — chitney and daisies

lifted, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and movement — or the shape

perhaps of resistance, whereas

the sea is striped and sways

repeatedly upon its planities stem

Those aren't Chaucerian daisies, but the large

coarse flowers that, like the orchids, abound in

distilled American land: by roadside, in gar-

den. Gardeners eradicate them mercilessly,

likewise, though it isn't Chaucer

—"When over the flowery, sharp pasture's edge"—into which, stubborn as the daisies and chicory, it resists being resolved. (Frequently, Williams is just a little off some familiar metre, the voice tugging one way and his lineation another. Everywhere, tension is critical. Especially, you have to see the poems while you hear them.)

For his floral *chef d'oeuvre* see "The Crimson Cyclamen", a remarkable eight-page poem; though be warned that on page 103 of the Penguin, nine lines from the bottom, "though" should probably be "though". Williams spins you an intricate dance enough without textual uncertainties.

His *annus mirabilis* was 1922, the year he wrote a cranky little book, *Spring and All*, that declared war on the Eliot of that same year's *Waste Land*. The waste land he'd have us regard is something you could photograph:

Beyond, the waste of broad, muddy fields brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen patches of standing water the scattering of tall trees — in April, cruellest month, these are burgeoning:

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish dazed spring approaches —

They enter the new world naked, cold, uncertain of all save that they enter. All about them the cold familiar wind —

"The new world": yes, New Jersey. Poems too are arriving there, as surely as "the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf":

One by one objects are defined — It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

Clarity, outline, those are Williams hallmarks. And, "spring approaches": that is a hallowed trope we can find for instance in Blake —

Oh thou with dewy locks, who lookest down Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn Thine angel eyes upon our western tale, Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring! Of the two poets, it is Williams here who has been much the more attentive. (Yes, I know, that is Blake before he was Blake.)

From eye to hand

Richard Swigg

CHARLES TOMLINSON
Notes from New York and other poems
64pp. Oxford University Press, £4.50.
0192119391
Translations
111pp. Oxford University Press, £7.95.
0192119583

Notes from New York begins with overview: snail Manhattan as glimpsed from an arriving jet; the map-like vista as seen from an urban summit. But these are the images, the eye's illusory containment of a world, by which Charles Tomlinson's poetry goes deeper, grasping concreteness inside the imagined. New York, above all, is his way to, a kind of fantasy that sharpens one's sense of the real, the human, and proportionate, in the balance between ground and air.

There is the equilibrium of the Iroquois construction workers ("Above Manhattan") who, from their high girders, look down at a city set out in "newsheet" symmetry. But the readable ease of the place (and poem) also suggests a danger, the disparity between image and ground. To "put / one foot wrong / is to drop / more than a glance", and though, in agile reading,

this closeness and that distance make dancing difficult a dance it is that the mind is led above Manhattan.

One learns further dexterity in the poem "At the Trade Center" where the eye contains, as if on one plane, Manhattan's "spread" and the human hand: "I spread my fingers / And the traffic runs between." Whitmanian exorbitance less Tomlinson finds a return to a more precise, felt measure: the new sense of scale between near and far as giant grip becomes vulnerable human clutching. "The elevator grounds / Us back to streets where / beggars / From their dreams of dust / ... / Hold out

Williams kept up the war on Eliot all his life, often pointlessly. In old age he could be heard decriing something he'd misunderstood, the relationship of "The Hippopotamus" to Gautier's "L'Hippopotame". "That he'd pass off a translation as something of his own" — the voice broke in incredulity. And he once asked a perfectly amazing question: could one talk to Eliot, "animal to animal"? No one else has ever entertained such a notion.

Yet it's to Eliot we owe *Spring and All* and the tremendous development that followed it, and very likely we also owe him *Poterson*. That long poem (1946-58) is Williams's *Four Quartets*, even to its original four books (he later added a fifth). Though he'd pondered it for years, it seems to have been the talk of Eliot's new achievement in the 1940s that spurred him to commit himself to it finally. Like the *Quartets* it meditates on named ground, though not on four different grounds (three of them English) but always on the same ground, on American ground: on Paterson, a city in New Jersey not far from his native Rutherford. In 1965 *The Times* (yes, the one in London) paid him the supreme compliment of thinking Paterson "an imaginary town ... which Williams created as his symbol of America". He'd have liked that: he had lifted a grubby ely to the domain of the imagination. "To make a start out of particulars", so its "Preface" begins, and soon the particulars are flooding:

Rolling in, top up, under thrust and recoil, a great clatter: lifted as air, boated, multicolored, a wash of seas — from mathematics to particulars — divided as the dew, floating mists, to be rained down and regathered into a river that flows and encloses:

shells and animalcules generally and so to man, to Paterson.

After that, the beginning proper seems unexciting:

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls its spent waters forming the outline of his back ...

one hand deep in the traffic sounds."

Adjustment back from Whitman is not accidental. In Tomlinson's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the eye, on its instantaneous flight over the water, brings together "the ghosts of Whitman's ferry" and future phantoms (New York's "all solidities", liquefying prophetically, as East River reflections) but also returns to substance. The ghostly "images / Crowding the enfilade of steel and stone" give back concreteness, just as Van Gogh sought it. "It was not seeming, but solidities / That took your glance", says Tomlinson in a poem which centres us in Europe again in order to recompense an artist whom he now feels he misjudged in his own *Seeing is Believing*. In these American Notes his keen eye for the variable, the contingent, and the seemingly slight — like the ice-creams melting at Blauenberg or the mirror's momentary reflections in a roadway — goes back to English ground and roots.

From this standpoint he sees "Whole tracts

November

All saints and all souls, martyrdom of the good days. Daylight is smoke out of the dark's bonfire. An old sun huddles in unclear caves. But here, anyway, is this step, now another step. In imaginary fields, a tractor spitters with purposes. As black coal in our black grates ignites in uncertain tongues, birch-blaze things over clinker where the coke works were.

ANNE STEVENSON

We may even discern a motif from *Flâneuse* Woke. But soon the poem is unmistakably his. Jostled as are the writers approaching the brink, his thoughts interlace, repeat and cut under, rise rock-thwarted and turn aside but forever turn forward — or strike an eddy and whirl, marked by a leaf or curdy spume, seeming to forget.

— To stop quoting is an effort.

Though uneven like any 250-page poem, *Poterson* contains some of Williams's finest writing — Without invention nothing is well spaced, unless the mind change, unless the stars are new measured ...

... unless there is a new mind there cannot be a new line, the old will go on repeating itself with recurring deadlines ...

as it does; or (something for anthropologists to discover)

On this most voluptuous night of the year the term of the moon is yellow with no light the air's soft, the night bird has only one note, the cherry tree in bloom

makes a blur on the woods, its perfume no more than half guessed moves in the mind ...

— three quatrains, and our century's best erotic verses.

Most of his lifetime American opinion repeated itself with recurring deadliness. It left no space in which he could exist. He was in his mid-fifties before a collection was issued by publisher you could trust to stay in business. Soon thereafter the New Critics began prying of Wit and Tension, which they couldn't discern in the quirky vivacity he'd derived from hard-edge painters and from looking and listening. For years there were no terms in which he could be discussed. It's not only in England that William Carlos Williams has been without honour. That he's now a principal mentor of the principal American poets something to be attributed to the tenacity of poetic intelligence.

and counties melted in a glance": a native New Yorker, however, that has learnt from vast American spaces. "Today", he says in this poem ("At a Glance") "you could almost rest your head upon the 'bulky ripple' of the distant mountains. And the view into space becomes a view into time, 'First flat crossing the scene to the eye / That sees it is still good, its touch a blank.' But, like the abysses beneath New York heights, there is an English 'void and formlessness of sky' which restores balance, with a sense of the dangerous and transitory. To grasp this is to make a treaty with creation in a violently secular way. Black jackdaws over the sea are 'Flung back at their rock in alternation / Of secure possession and a daring joy.' They have the zest and poise of buzzards in 'High Summer', kings of their sky, yet at the same moment linked back to solid earth on the currents which lead down to the up-thrusting leaves. The birds are called 'Aztec messengers of the sun', reminding us that the book's American dimension is also Mexican, and that the covenant with the concrete is made out of peril, from the possibility of the deathly plunge. The eye's flight, therefore, takes in old death-gods, whether Aztec in 'Mellancholous' or the twentieth-century variety that (as Trotsky's House) is left to the form of frozen, aod outdated, with the victim's abhorring return to a vanished, phantom Russia, 'Kremlined forever in historic snow'.

In *Translations* Tomlinson has brought together some extraordinary instances, ranging over twenty-five years, of his translated versatility — from Tyutchev and Khodasevich to Machado, Vallejo and Paz, to Ungaretti, Piccolo and Bertolucci. In one book again, for the first time, the reader can see how much Tomlinson shares with those poets of internationalism and nativeness, who, like Machado in the provincial bounds of "Poem of a Day" or Vallejo in the prison setting of *Tyler*, have reached out from isolation to larger, richer confluence.

A new Browning poem

Michael Mason

The poem printed in the next column which has escaped the notice of Browning's editors, appeared in the magazine *The Present Day* in April 1886. *The Present Day* was a short-lived periodical, one of a considerable line of such ventures in which the veteran reformer George Jacob Holyoake (who edited and largely wrote it) had sought over the years to disseminate his "Secularist" philosophy. So the context of Browning's poem is unexpected. Moreover Browning very seldom published poems in magazines, or in other than book-form of any sort. There are rather more exceptions in the 1880s compared with previous periods in his career, but these only amount to some thirty short pieces (or a total of 400-odd lines), to be set in the perspective of roughly 10,000 lines published in various volumes in this decade. Students of Browning have been aware that he had contacts with Holyoake involving copies of the first American edition (or projected edition) of the poet's complete works. These contacts become much more interesting with the discovery that, in some sense, they issued in a poem for Holyoake's magazine.

The story of Holyoake and the American edition can be reconstructed more fully than hitherto with the help of unpublished diaries and letters — in London (Bishopsgate Institute), Manchester (Holyoake House), and Princeton (Robert H. Taylor Collection) — but it is not an easy story to interpret. The 1868 *Poetical Works* was first printed in America in serial form between December 1872 and October 1874, in the monthly timetables of a railroad company (the project came to a halt well before it was complete). This strange piece of publishing, the *Official Guide to the Chicago and Alton Railroad* Nos 1-19 and 22-3, was conceived by the railroad's general agent, James Charlton, who also happened to be a friend of Holyoake ("an old Oweite friend from England" according to the latter's biographer). Holyoake visited America in 1879 and 1882; on both trips he spent time with Charlton, and on the second he travelled extensively on the Chicago and Alton lines. This information could be gathered from two books about his journeys which Holyoake had written (though neither refers to Charlton's poetic timetable).

Browning knew of the *Guide* at an early stage. The *Poll Mall Gazette* noticed it quite prominently on July 25, 1873, tendentiously suggesting that the author might dislike this manner of publication of his works (at no stage in this whole history, however, does Browning betray resentment that Charlton's edition was unauthorized, and gratis). At about the same

time the secretary of another railroad, a Mr Robert Avery, sent Browning the first seven numbers of the Chicago and Alton series; Browning was grateful, and requested that Avery send him further numbers "as long as his works are connected with it". This seems to have been done, at least until issue No 18. In 1883 Browning presented the first eighteen numbers (though his run for some reason had a "missing link", No 2) to the British Museum: No 9 being deposited on April 9, and the rest, in response to the Museum's interest, on May 26.

Duty

What is our duty? 'Tis to tend
From good to better — thence to best;
Grateful to drink life's cup — then bend
Unmurmuring to our bed of rest;
To pluck the flowers that round us blow,
Scattering their fragrance as we go.

And so to live, that when the sun
Of our existence alms in night,
Memorial sweet of mercies done
May shine our names in memory's light;
And the blest seeds we scattered, bloom
A hundred-fold in days to come.

So it is not surprising that Browning and Holyoake discussed the *Guide* when they first met in the summer of 1884 (probably on July 1). Browning seems to have requested, or at least permitted, Holyoake to try and obtain copies to fill the gaps in the British Museum set. Charlton, in a reminiscence published in 1890, says that he sent a "complete set" for this purpose at Holyoake's request. On November 27, Holyoake forwarded to Browning an unspecified group of numbers which he identified as those received from Charlton, and on January 13 "all the numbers I had on their first issue" (specified as Nos 9-17, and 19). He clearly implies that these represent all the parts in his possession, as he asks Browning to return "one only as a memento of the first and singular reprint of your Poems in Chicago".

At this point the puzzles start. How could Holyoake have obtained numbers of the *Guide* on "first issue"? He was certainly not in America at the time. Copies had evidently found their way to England — to journalistic quarters such as the *Poll Mall Gazette* — but why did Holyoake not send any numbers he had acquired in this or another fashion to Browning in the summer of 1884, as soon as the two men had met? There were copies of Nos 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 18 among the books dispersed at the Browning sale in 1913, and what are puzzlingly called in the sale-catalogue "duplicates" (perhaps because they were so inscribed) of Nos 9, 10 and 12-17 (we know that of the four

gaps in the British Museum set only No 19 had been filled from Holyoake's gift). To consider for the moment only issues 1-19: if Holyoake sent Browning a complete set of these parts, received from Charlton, and some ten parts in his own possession, the gift had disappeared in quite large quantities by 1913. It is possible that Browning, or someone else, gave away one of each pair in Holyoake's gift. On the other hand, were it not for the suggestion of "duplicates", what survived in 1913 looks exactly like the remains of only one set of the *Guide* (and it is striking that the only visible instance of duplication — of issue No 9 — involves the number of which Browning initially offered a specimen to the British Museum; he may well have been testing their reaction with a spare copy.)

Then there is the matter of the final numbers missing from the British Museum set. Holyoake included in his gift a copy of No 20 of the *Guide* — the issue in which the reprint was temporarily suspended — and attached this note to it: "included to show that the reprint of R. Browning's works ceased in No. 19, as Mr Charlton could not superintend their passing through the press." Even if this slightly ingratulating comment reflects Charlton's motives for discontinuing the reprint four months later, it shows that Holyoake was aware that the series had simply been suspended in July 1874 (and hence, if he ever had Nos 22 and 23, he never sent them to Browning). Charlton, on the other hand, is most unlikely to have forgotten this detail when he sent his copies (in his 1890 reminiscence he mentions the two months interval). If Holyoake in late 1884 was lending through the only copies of the *Guide* he had ever seen, or even heard much about, except from Browning himself — namely, those forwarded by Charlton — he might well have failed to notice that the reprint resumed in No 22. The run of copies he claimed to have acquired on "first issue" also stops at No 19. How probable is it that he made the same mistake twice?

The evidence is confusing. Holyoake has a certain reputation for toadyism, and one senses that he may have been acting the toady throughout these contacts, trying to stir the notice and gratitude of a literary lion. Did he succeed to the point of persuading Browning to offer a poem to his magazine a year later? Browning certainly expressed gratitude. "Be assured I shall never forget your kindness", he wrote on January 14, 1885, in acknowledging "your very generous gift of the pamphlets not otherwise procurable", and he promised to use the gift to make up any deficiencies in the British Museum set. He wrote on the same day to his literary factotum, F. J. Furnivall, to put this into operation. But if Holyoake's sequence included No 2 the failure to deposit this hitherto "missing link" with the British Museum's set is striking; it may reflect Furnivall's indiffer-

ence to Holyoake's efforts, or Browning's, or both men's. Browning told Furnivall, "I cannot recollect how far extends the set which the British Museum authorities were good enough to accept"; if, as this phrasing rather implies, he supposed that the project of printing his works in America had got considerably further, he would have been disappointed by Holyoake's contribution. He probably remembered that his own donation to the Museum of two years earlier was, as far as it went, almost unbroken (a fact that would have been even fresher in his memory in mid-1884, when the subject was first discussed with Holyoake).

No further record of exchanges has come to light, to explain by what steps this episode led to the appearance of "Duty" in *The Present Day*. But whatever sense of indebtedness Holyoake had created by his gift was clearly reinforced by some degree of sympathy on Browning's part for Holyoake's doctrines, as expressed in *The Present Day* and elsewhere. Later in 1885 both men appeared as contributors to the volume *Why I am a Liberal* (Browning with a sonnet that resembles "Duty" in making an unusually direct statement of beliefs). Holyoake's piece was subsequently reprinted in the same issue of *The Present Day* that carried Browning's poem. Browning would have approved of Holyoake's views more than might be supposed. The latter's Secularism was a long way from free thought; it denoted a mildly anti-clerical agnosticism, which had less time for atheism than for religion, and laid great stress on a moral righteousness independent of religious incentives. "Duty" is a common term with Holyoake, but actually rather rare in Browning (and in this poem he contrives to make Duty sound more a matter of hedonism than good works — a curious outcome to the association between the famous Secularist and the famous religious poet). "Duty" has affinities with some of the poems about impending death that appeared in *Asolando* three years later, especially parts of "Reverie".

It is nevertheless obviously a casual, even bad poem — and, above all, not Browningesque. The few poems that Browning published in occasional contexts were hardly ever collected in subsequent editions in the poet's lifetime, and sometimes they are disconcertingly straightforward, though never more so than "Duty". For Browning the proper way to publish was in distinct, planned volumes, their contents exhibiting the famous "difficulty" of his manner. More than any other work in the canon, perhaps, "Duty" shows that this idiosyncrasy of style was — in no pejorative sense — an artefact, a technique continually and deliberately readopted for that part of his output by which Browning sought to be remembered.

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Naturally unhousted

Terry Eagleton

MICHAEL HAMBURGER
Collected Poems 1941-1983
383pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £12.95.
085635 497X
MICHAEL HAMBURGER (Translator)
Goethe: Poems and Epigrams
93pp. Anvil Press. £6.95 (paperback, £3.95).
085646 0990

Midway through Michael Hamburger's *Collected Poems* is a section of sardonic social commentaries, stingingly dismissive of bureaucratic, cooperatorist, profit-obsessed capitalist society. These brief, bitter lampoons are not what Hamburger does best: he concedes in his "Author's Note" that he is no satirist, apologizes for the anti-Americanism of some of these pieces in a nervous variant on the "some of my best friends" formula and regards this section of his poetic production as "goblets of matter so coarse" that they resist assimilation to his work as a whole. This may be true technically, but hardly thematically. For Hamburger is not a "Nature poet" who permits himself the odd political blow-off; his abiding concern with natural life-forms (there is hardly a poem in these forty years and 480 pages without its cluster of plants) is closely entwined with a particular political vision. Hamburger is a Romantic libertarian repelled by an oppressive, inexorably administered social order which for him, as a writer of German Jewish provenance, reaches its intolerable apogee in the figure of Adolf Eichmann. Even when he is literally cultivating his own garden – one of his most persistent poetic activities – rumours and undertones of a predatory history are never far off.

Cultivating gardens, for Hamburger as for Andrew Marvell, is a precarious, ambiguous

practice, because it offers an alternative to the violence of history at the same time as it seems to mime it. Some of the earlier poems in this volume are tempted merely to envy Nature's stillness and repleteness, setting this in simplistic counterpoint to history's empty hungerings. As Hamburger evolves from these too generalized, rhetorical, inflexibly iambic pieces to words the leaner notations of his mature style, that contrast grows accordingly more complex. Nature may still be contrastable with culture in its spontaneity, but the last thing it offers you is shelter. The "natural" condition is one of being radically unhousted; Nature for Hamburger is always evanescent, unapproachable, finally beyond the frontiers of speech.

As the realm of the unaccommodated, then, it is as much a metaphor for a political history of exile and dispossession as a pastoral consolation for such ills. What it teaches you, if anything, is what German untranslatable terms *Gelassenheit*: letting be, letting go, embracing the strange gratuitousness of particular times and places. Hamburger writes, perhaps in an unwitting echo of Brecht's poem on Lao Tzu, of being "loyal even to water" – to the traditionally most faithless of elements, dispersing certainties and identities with no promise of their final recuperation. All that can finally be appropriated, as in the fine recent poem "Travelling" and "Suffolk", is one's own dispossession – the truth that there is no permanent tenure in either history of Nature, that all property and allegiance are provisional, that (to adopt the title of one of Hamburger's volumes) the earth is ownerless.

Hamburger shares to some extent the Heideggerian notion that listening is prior to speaking – that the poet's voice must catch what it can of the enigmatic idioms of natural life-forms rather than foist upon them its own self-preening monologues. The denominative gesture of speech seems for him inherently domineering: to name is to nail, to seek that full, fixed knowledge which is the dream of authoritarian ideologies. His own poetic language, accordingly, is best characterized negatively: neither ripely sensuous nor self-consciously chaste, neither formal nor colloquial, it seeks that point at which the poem refuses either to overwhelm its object or efface itself before it. Perhaps it is the fact that Hamburger is a good listener which makes him one of our finest translators. His translations of Goethe's poems and epigrams begin by insisting on what seems to him the essential elusiveness and untranslatability of Goethe's poetic work, which he finds curiously "anonymous" even at its most apparently subjective. It is appropriate, then, that these excellent translations should be the latest act of a poet who has consistently queried the deceptive unity of the ego, exploring instead a multiplicity of self, constructed in its encounters with the world, must find there what frail certainties and temporary lodging-houses it can.

Emigré matter

Peter Reading

ORMONDE DE KAY (Editor)
N'Heures Souris Rames: The County Castle Manuscript
68pp. Angus and Robertson. £3.95.
0207 145997

The verses also reminded me, insistently, of those in one of my favourite books, Luis d'Antin van Roonen's *Mots d'Héres: Gloses, Rames*. Reaching for my copy, I turned to the foreword: "The most fascinating quality of these verses," van Roonen had written therein, "is to be found upon reading them aloud in the sonorous, measured classic style made famous by the Comédie Française at the turn of the century... these poems then assume a strangely familiar, almost nostalgic, homely quality." Exactly! What van Roonen had observed about the d'Antin Manuscript applied equally, I saw, to the County Castle Manuscript.

Thus Ormonde de Kay prefaces his remarkable and scholarly monograph, the reproduction and erudite analysis of an important Middle French MS from County Castle (obtained, under somewhat questionable circumstances, by the author from a Hungarian collector).

(Also can sense, in these *pensées* of an idle

Shaman and showmen

Nicolas Tredell

RICHMOND LATTIMORE
Continuing Conclusions: New poems and translations
65pp. Louisiana State University Press
(distributed in the UK by International Book Distributors.) £11.85.
ROBERT PENN WARREN
Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé
64pp. Secker and Warburg. £3.95.
0436563193

Richmond Lattimore died earlier this year. In this collection of poems and translations he is still on the move, mentally and physically; but time – "verb not noun or adjective", as Lattimore notes – is on the move too, hurrying faster. In "Night Travel", for instance, its winged chariot becomes an Italian train, which

Slides into black, glides into its pitch and roll, tries to soar (bird on rails), wheels on in gathering speed, throwing Italian names back into the dark, throwing switch and points, lights, posto di blocco, discarded stations, throwing a shatter of thoughts, throwing our past, or our presence, away.

The sense of mutability, mortality, time accelerating, flesh ageing, runs through Lattimore's poems, but they do not make up a *dansé macabre*. As the poet wryly remarks more than once, his own end draws near – "Out of the billion biographies this one / moves at last to the term of its own formal arrangement" – but joy in life remains: "oh, those particulars". Self-slaughter is difficult to comprehend: the "Forlorn Dream Song" for John Berryman asks: "But why people go stand on a bridge, teeter / & jump? / Whoo, / no way to live". And a major *memento mori* of our time, the geriatric institution, is, in "Home", evoked gently, its inmates transfigured in the poem's last line into "Fragments of the imagination of God and his handwork".

Lattimore sometimes seems too sanguine, lapsing towards a "Gee-isn't-it-great-to-be-alive" ingenuousness. And those poems which at first give an impression of spontaneity can appear, on rereading, rather too evidently the product of craft. There are, for example, a number of poems like "Night Travel" in which the hectic onward rush of the lines, initially exhilarating – giving a sense of the poetry accelerating, tumbling over itself, to try and match the pace at which life seems sometimes to move – later allows doubts to creep in. The dust-cover photograph of Lattimore shows him wearing a check jacket that might have suited Nicely-Nicely Jobson in *Guns and Dolls*, and his poems do sometimes leave us with the feeling that we have witnessed a display of *spiel*: enjoyable, but too obvious. A quieter craft is evident in his translations from, for example, Cavafy and Leconte de Lisle.

Robert Penn Warren's narrative poem *Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé* focuses on the Indian chief's attempt, in 1877, to lead his Nez Percé band to Canada. It relates his clashes with Federal troops, his defeat and capture in Montana and his final years on a reservation. Familiar Warren themes play through the work: the corruption bred by power, ambition, the lust for gold; the sanctity of one's native soil. The Nez Percé are, at first, an "organic community", in harmony with themselves, each other, the earth and the gods; the start of the poem evokes a pastoral Eden of noble savages: "Boys, bareback, ride naked, / Leap on, shout 'Ai-yah! Shout 'Ai-yeel' – / I in unbridled glory". With the White Man comes greed, and the Fall.

Warren, like Lattimore, is an old professional, and *Chief Joseph*, which calls on his experience as both poet and novelist, is undoubtedly a skilful performance. Variations of metrical rhythm prevent monotony; prose extracts mainly from contemporary documents, are effectively intercut. The narrative is simple, and moves adroitly between the viewpoints of Joseph and the poet, with occasional forays into the minds of the Federal officers. The battle scenes are exciting, if in a somewhat schoolboyish way – "Then bursts the charge of the braves on their ponies – / The war-whoop, the whang of arrows at short-range". Death is depicted with a Homeric lack of fuss. The last sections of the poem give a moving account of Joseph's defeat at Snake Creek, his final year and the poet's own visit to Snake Creek a century later.

But the poem remains an anachronism; it harks back too much, in its poetic and narrative techniques, to the nineteenth century. There's something nineteenth-century too about Warren's treatment of the Indians. For instance, much is made of the military prowess of the Nez Percé, as if it was somehow surprising that Indians should show martial valour and skill, one is reminded of Kipling: "You're a poor benighted 'eathen but a first-class fighting man". And Warren's attempt to capture Indian life sometimes slips towards the "Whitemen-speak-with-forked-tongue" cliché.

Though *Chief Joseph* recognizes some of the ways in which narrative can distort history, it does not apply this recognition to its own operations. For instance, Warren observes that "to praise the red man was the way / Best adapted to expunge all, all, in the mist / Of bloodless myth", but conveys no sense that his own poem may be colluding in such a process. True, his poem has lashings of blood – but when we look closely, is it the real thing? In there an unacknowledged link between Buffalo Bill, "the magician who could transform... The blood of history into red ketchup", and the author of *Chief Joseph*? It may be that Robert Penn Warren, like Richmond Lattimore, has, as a poet, more than a touch of the showman.

Poetry publishing and publishers

Mick Imlah

Poetry is less an industry than a business, and less a business than a charity. The Arts Council and the regional associations currently spend a million pounds a year on it, in the knowledge that most of the benefits will be invisible. You can't, for example, put a figure on the pleasure derived by the students of Nene College from the presence there of Writing Fellow Dick Davis, or explain the value there might be in sending John Ash to read in Colchester. In one field, however, the fruits of recent investment are plain to see. We are producing more poetry books. Arts Council subsidies have enabled a new breed of specialist independent publishers, based outside London, to build up respectable lists in dogged defiance of their big commercial elders. Five presses in particular, each with the stamp of its energetic founder, have managed to maintain an impressive output: Carcanet (Michael Schmidt in Manchester), Bloodaxe (Neil Askey in Newcastle), Anvil (Peter Jay in Greenwich), Peterloo (Harry Chambers in Cornwall) and Salamander (Tom Fenton in Edinburgh).

Carcanet, which has grown from a small press of the late 1960s, is the oldest and largest of these. It has attracted the patronage of three senior figures, Donald Davie, Michael Hamburger and C. H. Sisson, whose bulky *Collected* editions it has been able to publish. Schmidt has also generated a lesser circle of writers whose names seem made for each other (like Raine and Reid, or Motion and Morrison); Ash, Boyle and Brackenbury, Wainwright, Wainman, Wells and Wilmer are parts of a settled Carcanet team. And they are very well served; the press is closely associated with a first-class magazine (*PN Review*) and has published Schmidt's own fearlessly subjective anthology of contemporary poets. Schmidt, who is Mexican, has identified himself with virtues of civility, conservatism, tradition, even Victorianism, in a way calculated to antagonize trendy London. Readers of America's premier poetry magazine, *Poetry* (Chicago), are about to enjoy these virtues in a special British issue that Schmidt is preparing for them. In short, if there is power in the little world of poetry, Schmidt is a powerful man. Carcanet secured an Arts Council grant of £41,940 in 1982-3.

If Carcanet have reached the first division of poetry publishing, Bloodaxe are moving to join them in the near future under the very different editorial style of the precocious Neil Askey and his battery of Anasofones. In the Bloodaxe story, good intentions bleed with Arts Council cash to create a monster of reputation. The transition from small press came in 1981, with a grant of £10,000 for the purpose, and the current subsidy from Northern Ireland Arts stands at £16,500. The better you do, the more you get; as Askey says, "They wouldn't provide funding at our present level if we weren't shifting the books." Bloodaxe print ten titles a year (plus two novels) with runs of 500-2,000, and would print 1,100 copies of a sixty-four-page paperback first collection; stat-

istically, then, they are a sizeable concern.

And yet, though they are rightly proud of properties like Ken Smith and David Constantine, their list is not quite mature. Their main work is still the worthy plugging of gaps; taking on what the small presses are unable and the commercial houses unwilling to publish. An example is Hart Crane's *Complete Poems*, out soon, which Bloodaxe has only been able to claim because OUP dropped Crane from their list of authors. Another trend is for well-known poets to favour hungry presses with long poems or short sequences for pamphlets, while maintaining a prior commitment to a senior publisher (Carol Rumens and Douglas Dunn at Bloodaxe, Derek Mahon and Peter Porter at Anvil). Bloodaxe and Anvil have also been drawn naturally to the comparatively open field of poetry in translation, with its many moral advantages. Peter Jay is himself a prolific translator (though the new breed are more likely to be professional men who write, if at all, as a secondary interest); and Anvil has nearly twenty contemporary foreign-language poets in print, including Elytis, Pilinszky, Quasimodo, Rózewicz and Seferis. Fashion is certainly shifting in translation's favour; so much new British poetry alludes to Mandelstam, Montale, Trakl, Neruda and Seferis that it is unsophisticated as well as impoverishing not to know their work. In the magazines and bookshops, though, Little England dies hard, and Askey's decision to print 1,550 copies of the *Complete Poems* of the Norwegian Edith Södergran is sheer bloody-mindedness.

Similar grumbles about the prejudices of the national press emanate from Yorkshireman Harry Chambers in Cornwall. Like Askey, he is a splendidly energetic promoter whose honest products haven't always caught the eye. His frustration has been keenest at the neglect suffered by the Peterloo Poetry Cassette.

Chambers's special distinction is to have published good first volumes from several authors approaching the age of fifty: U. A. Fanthorpe, Stanley Cook, Joan Downer, Elizabeth Bartlett, Elma Mitchell. He gets as much quiet pleasure from cultivating these careers of the early evening as other editors will do from the bright birth of their latest young genius. And U. A. Fanthorpe, at least, has had real success; her first volume *Side Effects* has sold over 2,000 copies, and her *Selected Poems* will appear as a King Penguin, in an edition of 10,000, in the spring of 1986. Encouraged, adventurous and subsidized, Chambers made a cassette recording of Fanthorpe and Mitchell reading their work, which he sent out for review on December 1 – a few weeks, alas, after the first pair of Peterloo Poetry Cassettes. It sank without trace in their wake.

This lesson – that there is no substitute for national reputation in the getting of reviews or sales – is borne out by the first four years of Tom Penton's Salamander Press. Fenton has had to claim his subsidies piecemeal, book by book, from the Scottish Arts Council, but he started with two compeer advantages. First, he had contact through his brother James with a body of very saleable poets; second, he has a feel for style, and poetry book design was

at a low cbb in 1980. Fenton chose not to adopt any cost-cutting format, but instead offered his authors a chance to participate fully in the design of their books. Result: happy authors, beautiful productions. James Fenton's *The Memory of War* has sold a remarkable 3,000 hardback copies; volumes by Craig Raine and Andrew Motion have also done well. But then, they would. The sudden celebrity of the press has done little, on the other hand, to attract buyers to Kathleen Jamie and Ron Butler; although their books have been reasonably reviewed and tirelessly hawked, sales have got stuck at the 300 mark.

Together, these five relative newcomers brought out over forty substantial volumes of poetry last year; about one half of the total number. Signs are that the big sleepy London houses are beginning to stir to the challenge. There is talk of rejuvenation, of a "boom" even, which only means that Faber and Chatto have appointed new part-time editors. Croig Raine's sent at Faber is the cushiest in the business, padded with Larkin and Hughes and Heaney and Gunn and Dunn and now Muldoon and some of the best post-war Americans. Raine began as though he wanted to cut some throats; but all he has had to do since is to shake the dust off the style and top up his outstanding list from the queue of new faces, beginning with those of Michael Hofmann and Philip Gross (who made his first appearance with Peterloo).

At Chatto, though, where the new broom is the order of the day, a little more is being asked of Andrew Motion. The "Phoenix Living Poets" series has been laid to rest, and Chatto Poetry is launched next month with Sellma Hill's first book and an anthology of British West Indian verse. The momentum will be taken up in the autumn by Blake Morrison's *Dark Glasses* and a collection from the New Yorker Frederick Seidel. Motion has radical intentions: his books are cheapish, exotically designed (pyramids and palm trees) paperbacks, and assured of a determined sales effort. They will also benefit from the exposure that Motion's appeal to the media has already achieved for them. Complaints have been heard in less glamorous circles about a *Guardian* interview with Motion which gave Chatto's then non-existent new stable more publicity than Bloodaxe, Carcanet and Anvil have had for the work of years; but that is why they employed him.

Motion's success, when it comes, will be to have convinced a lot of people that he is presenting new kinds of poetry in thoroughly new and exciting ways, with special commitment to American and translated poets, and so on. In fact his flair and the banana covers conceal a hoary old model: the Secker and Warburg poets. The deliberate balance of Motion's first four titles is reminiscent of what adviser Anthony Thwaite had in mind for the Secker series, instituted in 1971: "The pattern of the first four titles was one which I hoped to keep as we went on: established poets, new poets, American poets, and poetry in translation." Secker has since become a byword for dullness of presentation and lackadaisical promotion,

despite considerable Arts Council support (£7,000 in 1982-3); not enough has been made of assets like George MacBeth, John Fuller and the highly saleable Peter Reading. Spring fever has hit Secker too, though, in a modest dose. Three of the four Poetry Book Society Choices for 1983 – worth 1,000 copies each – were Secker titles, and confidence is inching upwards.

Little wonder, if even Secker is beginning to enjoy its poetry, that Penguin should be tempted back to the contemporary scene. Their Modern and European Poets series, discontinued in the late 1970s, were handsome little gifts to the nation; but their latest involvement has a leaner, more hawkish appearance. It is explained in charitable terms – Penguin's recent good fortune permits – but there has been no unbusinesslike behaviour to date. They have been buying up popular poets for good value *Selecteds*: Fenton, Motion again, Fanthorpe, Tony Harrison and the unproven Jeremy Reed. Still, they do express a desire to "originate new work", and when their spokesman bemoans "the Faber-OUP axis, which swallows up so much of the best material", there is a suggestion, from the biggest publisher in the land, that there isn't enough poetry of high quality and sales potential to go round.

Readers of poetry have a hard enough time as it is. Moving from books to magazines, the situation looks slightly less healthy than vibrant. Anyone wanting to be sure not to miss a good poem would have to subscribe to these periodicals: *Amble*, *Argo*, *Akros*, *Axix*, *Adam*, *Arrow*, *Agenda*, *Aquarius*, *New Departures*, *New Poetry*, *Newcastle Poetry*, *New Oxford Poetry*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Poetry Wales*, *Poetry World*, *Poetry Matters*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry Nation Review*, *Literary Review*, *Lines Review*, *Straight Lines*, *Stand*, *Snoke* and fifteen or twenty others, as well as to the weeklies and fortnightly. A survey of the small presses active in recent years would take – probably is taking – someone's lifetime: Graylag, Grosseteste, Sceptre, Scorpio, Fulcrum, Rivelio, Many, Arc, Aloes, Fig, Pug, Hub, Hippopotamus, Galloping Dog, Menard, Canard, Oxus, Oasis, Ferry, Trigram, Sofa, Taurus, Sycamore, Tusk and a thousand more.

One glimpse at such a mass of print suggests that poetry has become a uniquely unbalanced art – that most of it never gets read at all. I took a survey to test the point, and asked a cross-section of one hundred people in a London suburb about their interest in poetry. Not one had bought a book of poems in 1983. Yet, while only five claimed to read poetry at all regularly (and four of these were still at school) no fewer than thirteen claimed to have written something they would describe as poetry "more than once" in the past year. Project these figures nationally and you get the appalling statistic of over 7 million British poets – more people than go angling, and enough to burst fifty thousand Arts Council Anthologies. Hutchinson have discontinued their Arts Council Anthology. There is likely to be a surplus.

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his "uneven development". By 1936 John Lehmann in an otherwise admiring article notices a "religious note" and "a failure to advance to new positions" in his work, and sees his future direction as "extremely problematical". In fact the reviewers of the 1930s generally turn out to have been pretty divided among themselves – and, contrary to the *Scrutiny* theory that Auden suffered from a total "absence of exposure to criticism" (the words are Leavis's), even the MacSpaunday group could be extremely damning, about his subversive experiments in political poetic drama in particular. Instead one is faced with a multiplication of styles and Audens – and an absence of clear consensus, even in the 1930s.

There is an ironic connection between the themes of his early work, and subsequent readings of his career (his diagnoses were always infectious). The novel evolutionary sense he introduced into poetry – whether of geological epochs, Marxist class analyses, Freudian stages of infantile development, or technological obsolescence – was turned against him. His opponents attacked him for failing to evolve properly, failing to grow up, failing to wean himself from his bourgeois class-background, becoming part of the Old Gang he had guyed in his young days, filling his late Horatian verse with what Terry Eagleton saw as "obsolete historical postures". There are two sides to this – the political and the psychological.

The political case was argued most powerfully in two essays not included here – Orwell's "Inside the Whale", on the failure of the Leftist intelligentsia, and "Outside the Whale" by E. P. Thompson, on the disastrous political disenchantment of English intellectuals in the war and post-war period. Thompson gives the "political bowdlerisation" of the socialist Auden at his own later hands, and the trend towards orthodox Christian conservatism in his post-war work, as prime instances of the "abdication of responsibility" in political matters by Auden's generation. Donald Davie, in a telling review in 1955, wondered whether "this poet has made his peace with society too wholeheartedly and too soon". This argument seems to me right in the main, but overlooks the continuity between the subversive tyr of *Poems* (1930) and the cosmopolitan home-maker of "Thanksgiving for a Habitat": age heightens his sense of historical obsolescence while it diminishes his relish for it and – even though theology replaces Marxism – Auden remains the most thoroughly anthropological poet of the modern world ("Nobody I know would like to be buried / with a silver cocktail shaker / a transistor radio and a strangled / daily help"). John Updike, in a subtle celebration of *About the House*, writes that the best poems "are redeemed from triviality by the seriousness with which Auden considers his own comforts an episode in civilization".

It is the seriousness/triviality factor which worries the other evolutionary critics of Auden – the *Scrutiny* group who argue that Auden never grew up. Leavis and the depressingly indistinguishable Leavisites saw in him "an inverted process of development". "Maturity of years", grumbled Robin Mayhead, "has not brought maturity of outlook"; *Nones*, in particular, was "hardly what one expected from a responsible man growing older". So much the worse for "maturity" and "responsibility" if

they cannot acknowledge the wit and worldliness of one of Auden's funniest, tarrest books. Auden called Tennyson the poet of the schoolroom. The relations between low seriousness and high levity, light verse and social commentary, high style and high jinks, were always uneasy in Auden's work – from *Dance of Death* to *Thank You, Fog*. At its best, this constitutes a buoyant and provocative critique of seriousness – and "maturity". Freud's startling rewriting of childhood provided Auden with a way of jazzing up the Wordsworthian version, establishing a new set of shared references with his audience and an effective handle for a kind of psychoanalytic satire – a device for revealing the "low" desires behind the "high" seriousness of his class, as well as the bizarre "convolutions of the simple wish".

The Auden *Critical Heritage* makes fascinating history; it confirms both the 1930s sense of a poem as an event in society and Auden's later sense of the poem as a virtuoso performance. The reviewers included here – critics, such as Empson, Leavis, Wilson, Levin, Davie; poets such as Larkin, Jarrell, Gunn, Heaney, MacNeice; novelists such as Greene, Waugh, Updike, Forster; and contemporary professorial stars such as Ricks, Kermode and Carey – confirm Auden's centrality to the development of poetry to our period and to the mythology of the time.

Edward Callan's book, one of the first critical studies of Auden's entire career, bears a promising title (deriving from one of Auden's later essays), *Auden: A Carnival of Intellect*, but unfortunately it belies its carnivalesque promise. As one would expect of the author of the more aptly titled *W. H. Auden: An Annotated Check-list*, it is in fact a sober, scholarly and inclusive résumé of Auden's life and major works. But it is also lenten stuff. Apart from a few scattered references to Auden's off-the-cuff theory of carnival ("We oscillate between wishing we were unreflective animals . . . and disembodied spirits . . . The carnivalesque solution of this ambiguity is to laugh, for laughter is simultaneously a protest and acceptance"), Professor Callan seems neither to get the jokes nor to give a plausible account of the celebratory, playful and outrageous in Auden's intellectual carnival.

The "Carnival" idea is largely irrelevant to the book, at both the practical and theoretical levels (there is no reference to Bakhtin on Rabelais, for example). Callan quotes Auden's endorsement of Valéry's view that "a poem ought to be a festival of the intellect", a kind of solemnly significant game, with its own special rules, and he is good on some of the solemn metrical rules Auden applied throughout his career – from early Owen-type "slant-rhyme" to his late play with syllables and haiku. But Auden's essay on Valéry also speaks of the French poet as a salutary remedy against his becoming "un homme sérieux", who he should be aiming at being "un homme d'esprit". Callan has the disadvantage of being an "homme sérieux".

The argument of his book concerns what he calls "Auden's fear of the dangers of our intellectual inheritance from Romanticism both in politics and literature, and his rejection of its one-sided Platonist presuppositions in favor of a Christian regard for the unity and coherence

of nature and spirit". Unfortunately Callan doesn't really define what is meant by Romanticism here; without treating at length Auden's one extended essay on Romanticism, "The Enchanted Flood", he loosely associates it with the cult of the inspired Bard as a proto-fascist phenomenon (though Gray's Bard had served the Romantics as a model of sublime spokesman for the politically repressed), with the distrust of science he ascribes to "Wordsworth and his fellow nineteenth-century Romantics" (in fact many of them, Coleridge and Shelley in particular, were considerably more interested in science than Pope or T. S. Eliot), and with utopian Leftist politics. He interprets Auden's powerful "In Time Of War" sequence wholly in terms of the poet's conversion to the idea behind "his later American works", that "the imaginative original genius spawned the modern totalitarian dictator, whether of the Left or Right" (an extrapolation from one sonnet in the series). Up till then, according to Callan, Auden seemed to be on "the high road to a poetry grafted onto political romanticism" (this seems to mean "Left-wing"). Callan is patently out of sympathy with the "vaguely utopian promise of his early volumes", is embarrassed by "overtures" of Marxist ideology in early Auden (though he limits them to the years 1932-4), and shares Mendelson's reading of "Spain" as a propagandist betrayal of Auden's real convictions.

In general, as these details suggest, Callan has little sympathy with early Auden – he views both his politics and his homosexuality with barely concealed distaste. His style treats both, but especially the latter, with clinical tweezers, as when he writes of Auden in Berlin ("he indulged his sexual proclivities with delinquent boys in impoverished quarters of the city"), or his relationship with Chester Kallman. It is obviously with some relief that Callan announces "by the end of the thirties he had

become, philosophically, not a Communist but a would-be Christian".

Callan is generally more at home with later Auden. His summarization of the ideas and then explanation of the form approach works better with the later poetry of ideas than the early lyrics, partly because of the more static and schematic nature of the poems themselves. The later Auden seems a more drably earthed poet on this reading than I had previously thought, not a good advertisement for bleating Romanticism for all that's bed in ert and life.

Callan's book covers Auden's whole poetic output – poems, plays and operas – and tries to provide a potted version of the life in between. As a result, it falls between stools. Perhaps that explains the carnival hat – and the unrepentant hold-all thesis about the dangers of Romanticism. In any event the readings of the individual poems are generally so dull that I can't see this as being of much use to the general reader. However, Callan's treatment of the long poems and longer cycles draws attention to the range and variousness of Auden's experiments with long forms.

In his methodological summary of the successive positions officially held by Auden during his career, Callan compares Auden with Pope as another poet of his age, and concludes astonishingly that "if not pre-eminent", each might be said to be "a representative journeyman of his age" – with the "wound" of homosexuality suggested as the equivalent of Pope's irreparably damaged spine. This image of the poet as Wounded Journeyman shrinks into insignificance beside the words of Randall Jarrell, once Auden's most damaging critic, as he looked back from the "mitigated triumph" of *Nones* to the poetry of the 1930s:

He wrote, then, some of the strongest, strangest, and most original poetry that anyone has written in this century; when old men, dying in their beds, mumble something unintelligible to the nurse, it is some of those lines that they will be repeating.

Problematical dandies

Anthony Thwaite

LACHLAN MACKINNON
Elliot, Auden, Lowell: Aspects of the
Baudelairean Inheritance.
191pp. Macmillan. £20.
0333 339916

Lachlan Mackinnon seems to be a highly intelligent man whose provocative book has been unfortunately disabled. Some of the evidence he has sought is not properly available, and he has therefore based much of his analysis on paraphrase and speculation, with all their resultant limits and approximations. Behind Elliot, Auden and Lowell, Mackinnon tries to suggest, is the example of Baudelaire – Baudelaire as dandy. Each of the later poets, he argues, adapted Baudelaire to suit his own needs, consciously, or unconsciously. It is an interesting notion, but not, on the face of it, a centrally important one. Nevertheless, Mackinnon is pertinacious enough to have made out of it a thesis (literally so: the book apparently began life as a doctoral thesis), which up to a point is worth reading and arguing with.

But much of the evidence is necessarily sparse. The recent correspondence in these pages about Michael Hastings's play *Tom and Viv* shows how problematical Elliot's early life, letters, and uncollected or unpublished early poems are. Lachlan Mackinnon, trying to discuss such poems as "Caprices" in North Cambridge and "Silence", has to fall back on the same strategy as Lyndall Gordon in *Elliot's Early Years* (another intelligent but inevitably flawed book): that is to say, he has to paraphrase, but cannot quote from, unpublished poems, languishing in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library in Elliot's Notebook and folder of miscellaneous manuscripts. Thus we have paraphrases of paraphrases: "Caprices in North Cambridge", as described by Lyndall Gordon, sound Baudelairean in their coming to rest on scenes of urban squalor, while "Silence", again in Mrs Gordon's account, sounds Baudelairean in its apprehension of a higher reality in a specific urban setting. Well, maybe; but one would like to be able to read the poems themselves

Mackinnon is more fortunate with Auden, in that he is allowed to quote at least some of the unpublished material. But we have to rely on his acumen in doing so. The "collection of Auden juvenilia which was in private hands but has recently (1980) been given to the Bodleian Library" is drawn on to provide evidence for "Auden's gradual acceptance and willed recapture of childhood", the contrast between that and the "childhood" poems themselves; but the poems themselves are not, of course, accessible to those who don't trek to the Bodleian. They are too early to have been included in Edward Mendelson's edition of *The English Auden 1927-1939*; and, though Mackinnon is relatively generous in his quotations, he holds back (perhaps for copyright reasons; one isn't told) from giving more than a handful of the poems in full.

With Lowell, the problem has been, not unavailability of poems but, presumably, the exigencies of timing. Mackinnon makes no reference to, and does not quote from, Ian Hamilton's magisterial biography of Lowell, first published in the United States in 1982. There is nothing from the letters, notes and so forth on which Hamilton drew so usefully: Mackinnon paraphrases what he thinks the poems are "about". But Lowell's letters to and from an enormous variety of people, extensively quoted by Hamilton, together with Hamilton's interviews with Elizabeth Hardwick, Caroloe Blackwood and many others, supply a great deal more than paraphrase.

For all Lachlan Mackinnon's intelligence, ingenuity and acuity, his book is rather like a triptych, which has been beautifully framed but the three parts of which show bewildering gaps in the actual painting. Many critics (and many more biographers) dealing with twentieth-century subjects are faced with the same problem. The high-minded objections of various correspondents in the TLS recently to any delving into the "lives" of writers in an attempt to throw light on "works" strike, of course, at the very roots of such enterprises as Mackinnon's. They are not my objections; Mackinnon's is a critical book which uses "lives" when it can; and "lives" when it can. But it demonstrates many disadvantages of availability and access.

Little deaths

Grevel Lindop

GEORGE MACBETH
The Long Darkness
66pp. Secker and Warburg. £5.95.
0436 270161

"Nature poetry"? "The poetry of place"? One groans inwardly at the very phrases. So much dreary and derivative writing has huddled for so long in the limited space they suggest that it is hard to believe anyone can now write valuably or even convincingly about the seasonal return of wild flowers, the behaviour of birds in winter or the monuments in the local churchyard. Seing such titles as "A Thrush", "Butterflies in September" and "A Winter Walk" among the contents of *The Long Darkness*, the reader may sense an aura of decayed pastoral and want to hurry away.

This would be a serious mistake. The poems with those titles in George MacBeth's latest book are disconcertingly good: sharp, clear and unsentimental. MacBeth has come a very long way since *A Doomsday Book* and *The Colour of Blood*, whose modishly contrived violence seems, in retrospect, so tamely conventional. *The Long Darkness*, like its justly acclaimed predecessor, *Poems from Oby*, delivers some real and salutary shocks by revealing a kind of emotional nakedness that demands of the reader an answering openness.

Contemplating "My Father's Patents", the framed, red-sealed patents registered – "more for honour than for pay" – by his inventor father, MacBeth resolves, almost with naiveté, "Time to be honest, and try hard". He balances a sense of his own achievement against a more

basic feeling of inadequacy; the blend of exhilaration and melancholy is typical of the book as a whole.

Many of the poems are concerned with death: the deaths of small creatures – a leveret, a meek, several birds – or of people, or both. The parallels with Hardy and Cowper can hardly be missed. Certainly, MacBeth's verse has a hit-or-miss quality quite different from the sharp-edged fluency of Cowper or Hardy's four-square deliberation, but he shares with both poets a remarkable plainness of diction and an ability to stare patiently at frightening and insoluble problems.

Yet *The Long Darkness* does not lack exuberance, and at times the imagery takes on a brittle expansiveness reminiscent of Metaphysical wit. "A Broken Alarm Clock" has more than a hint of Donne; Marvell lurks behind "A Winter Walk", despite the title's clear debt to Cowper. Other influences are acknowledged but neatly fended off. Larkin makes himself felt several times, and on each occasion is effectively snubbed. In "Friends" MacBeth answers "Churchgoing" with a distinctly Larkinesque couplet: going into a Catholic church to light a candle for a dead friend, he remembers how he used to "hate" such places – "mimble, incense, candle-wax, / And faithful idlers with their stooping backs". Stooping himself, he now sees memories of the dead as both looms and guttering candles for the living: "I light them, and their flames are still unfurled". To compare MacBeth with such a range of other poets is really to say that his book is highly individual, that it has a strange, pungent flavour of its own which grows more interesting with each rereading.

Spectral studies

David Profumo

JEREMY REED
By The Fisheries
79pp. Cope. £4.
0224 021540

"Conjunctivitis" is not, perhaps, the most promising word with which to open a serious poem. Typically, Jeremy Reed takes that risk, and the poem in question, "John Clare's Journal", is one of several quirky dramatic monologues in his latest collection. Much of the prolific Reed's previous work has been irritatingly convoluted – pages given over to the representation of psychic anguish charted by motifs of vertigo, hypodermics and suicide – and the hallucinatory effects linger in some of these new poems, though they have now become less predominant, as have the Jacobean flourishes that made his earlier work so tortuous.

So, in several ways *By The Fisheries* presents the poet in a welcome new aspect. Without

losing their tension, these poems are generally clearer both in narrative shape and visual detail. There is a fresh focus on natural description, too, reflected in the line-up of titles ("Rain", "Tulips", "Snail"); Reed handles with particular vigour his several studies of fish, from the title-poem and "Mulle", with their spectral touches, to a piece such as "Cooger" which resembles the Hughes of *Lupercal*.

Less dependent, these days, on complicated metamorphic action, Reed seems prepared to address his subjects more directly – perhaps with more confidence – and the results are often rewarding, especially when the narrative bears the mark of pathos, as in "Visiting Hours" where a son confronts a parent who has cancer. One of the strongest poems here, "Sea-Room", achieves a combination of topography and elegy which characterized the spirit of Reed's earlier "Jackson Greece" sequence (from *A Man Afraid*, 1982) and it is to be hoped that in his future work such steadiness of poise will permanently replace the verbal excesses.

Waterlicked

Bluster-shower August – exploded thunderlight
Tumbling in a crystal.

Eastward an hour, defectors, fishing like truants,
August Bank-holiday millions roaming in disquiet.

A thought of pike, thoroughly ravenous,
In Bridgewater Canal. Woe on the hope!

Flow-combed pond-weed folded the dull water
In a sunk hammock, where our plug-balls garishly popped.

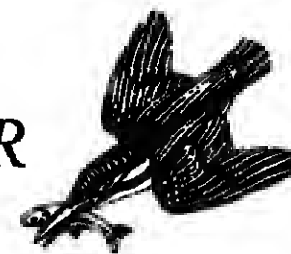
All afternoon, with between-cloud glare, and the long hurt
Of the bent narrows, a weariness wore us.

A thin madness of windy-glitter water and its empty fractures.

All afternoon, Essex inert subombra
Like a fixed, eternal number, ferocious and lucid.
Absent as baby's dreams.

In a migraine of dazzle and gloom
We flitted away Westward, among spark emeralds,
To the blue twilight tint.

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Hating the beautiful trees

Mark Abley

MARGARET ATWOOD (Editor)
The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in
English
477pp. Oxford University Press. £15.
019 540 3967

Canadian poetry got off to a fairly miserable start. "We have seen thee, queen of cheese / Lying gently at your ease, / Gently fanned by evening breeze, / Thy fair form no flies dare seize." Alas, Margaret Atwood omits from this anthology James McIntyre's "Ode on the Mammoth Cheese". But she does include some work by Charles Heavyside, who emigrated from Yorkshire to Montreal in time to write a verse epic called *Saul* containing such lines as these: "And so to inform old Samuel from heaven's height / It is which doth me down the morning bring". "Ungainly though remarkable" is Atwood's description of *Saul*. She attempts to get around the mediocrity of nineteenth-century poetry in Canada by means of a sly rhetorical trick: "Those who do not like Victorian poetry will not like Canadian Victorian poetry any better; but those prepared to accept its conventions may find much to interest them." Those who do not care for scurvy will not like Ontario scurvy either; but this does nothing to redeem a poisonous drink.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the first attempt by Oxford University Press to introduce Canadian poetry to a breathless world proved to be nearly as embarrassing as many of the verses it contained. The *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, published in 1913, featured no fewer than twenty-five pages of poetry by its editor, Wilfred Campbell, including a long panegyric upon "the glory and pride and aim / Of the Empire that girdles the world". Campbell also inserted eight poems by the ghostly Ethelwyn Withersall and four by the Duke of Argyll, a lout and unlamented Governor-General who had once endured five years in Ottawa. Campbell's anthology was an honest, dismal attempt to answer the question posed by one William D. Lighthall in his poem "The Confused

Dawn": "What are the Vision and the Cry / That haunt the new Canadian soul?" The nation's poets took a good deal of time to discover that the muses care little for geography.

By the time the second Oxford anthology appeared, the picture had changed entirely. A. J. M. Smith, who edited a new *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* in 1960, was an accomplished poet and scholar, whose participation in the "New Provinces" movement in the 1930s had helped to bring modernism to Canadian poetry once and for all. He described the typical Canadian poet of previous generations as "a half-baked, hyper-sensitive, poorly adjusted, and frequently neurotic individual that no one in his senses would trust to drive a car or light a furnace . . . He has a soft heart and a soft soul; and a soft head." In retrospect the central poem of Smith's era seems to me to be "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" by A. M. Klein. Except for his ironic title, Klein pays no attention to the splendours of the natural world – the dominant subject-matter among even the best Canadian poets until after the First World War. Instead he presents an inward drama in which the poet's despair at his loneliness and irrelevance is balanced by his joy in "the torso veep, the beautiful face of the noun, / and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries". Taut, urban, complex and unhappy, Klein's poetry is resonant with a sense of history infused by myth – the quality that, more than anything else, distinguishes so much recent Canadian writing.

It is a sign of how quickly the map of the nation's poetry has altered that a third Oxford anthology should be considered necessary less than twenty-five years after Smith's book appeared. In spite of its increased bulk, *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* restricts itself to poetry originally composed in this language, whereas Smith had included work by nearly thirty poets in French. The 1960s and 70s were extraordinary years for Canadian poetry, in terms of both the quality and the quantity of work that emerged. It even seemed, for a time, as though the nation might have fostered an audience for all its authors. Not only did a swarm of young writers and publishers appear after the mid-1950s, but many older poets began to create work with flair, craft and passion. Preeminent among this group is the figure of Al Purdy, whose rambling, shambling, apparently effortless lyrics have misled dozens of younger writers into paying him the false tribute of imitation. His poems catch and retrieve the Canadian idiom with an astonishing sureness of touch. Few of them, incidentally, could be mistaken for American.

The central question confronting English-Canadian poets is still that of finding an appropriate voice, a distinctive and authentic mode of using a multinational language. In the view of Ralph Gustafson, who edited the *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*, "English-Canadian writers wrote naturally in the belief that they were a part of the heritage that includes the author of *Beowulf* and Chaucer. They still do." Others feel that the language of Britain is as alien to a Canadian poet today as the idiom of Harlem might be to an Oxford don. Even Northrop Frye has suggested that for a Canadian, "the traditions of Europe appear as a kaleidoscope whirling with no definite shape or meaning, but with a profound irony lurking in its varied and conflicting patterns". Such irony extends to the traditional means of organizing a poem. Spoken in a flat, expansive North American voice, an iambic line can sound bizarre; and a sonnet even more so.

Certainly the work of many early Canadian poets was disfigured by a reliance on verse-forms that were unsuited to their own habits of speech, their own understanding of life. But in recent years, the fear of colonialism and the pressure to invent have led Canadian writers to an excessive reliance on unstructured verse, as if structure were somehow un-Canadian. In part the feeling is political; it may be related to a remarkable interest and sympathy among the nation's writers for the first inhabitants of the space that would become Canada. At the end of his long poem *The Pride*, John Newlove suggests that eventually the Indians "become our true forbears, moulded / by the same wild or rain, / and in this land we are their people, come / back to life again". The conviction of

unity is also a linguistic one: "the pride, the grand poem / of our land . . . will come, welcome, and / sought for, and found, / in a line of running verse . . .". Not, obviously, in a line of iambic pentameter, the metre of the conquerors. The poet Tom Marshall has put the point succinctly: "Canadian poetry had to find its own way out of the English confinement of those hedge-rows, rhyme and metre." Yet there continue to be a few good poets in Canada, as in the United States, who make effective use of the traditional verse-forms without sounding like slavish mimics of any British writers. And the general reliance on free-form poetry in Canada today produces a mountain of patry, unmemorable verses, a few of which have even found their way into Atwood's anthology.

English-Canadian poetry has not been written only by natives of the country. Contributors to this book were born in Italy, Romania, Ireland, the Netherlands, the US, Hungary, the Ukraine, and Sri Lanka; but the British connection is of particular importance (though Canadians often prefer to forget it). Apart from immigrant writers in earlier centuries, and apart too from Canadian poets who arrived from Britain in childhood, this collection includes work by Patrick Anderson, Malcolm Lowry, Francis Sparshott, Robin Skelton, Anne Szumigalski and George Woodcock – all of whom left Britain as adults. They didn't always like what they found. Lowry described a Vancouver on which "The mountains gaze in absolute contempt", while Anderson characterized Canada as "America's attic, an empty room, / a something possible, a chance, a dance / that is not danced. A cold kingdom." But even for such detractors, the impact of a new culture usually proved a blessing to the imagination. British publishers ought to take particular note of Anne Szumigalski, a marvellous writer (ill represented by Atwood's odd choice of her work) whose poetry mingles images from Hampshire and Wales with images from the western prairies. Szumigalski has as audacious an imagination as that of any poet now working in England, with the possible exception of Peter Redgrove.

To counteract any lingering idea of Canadian verse as a body of work that concentrates on forests, lakes and winters, Atwood includes a large number of poems about politics – national, international, sexual. The public poetry of Dennis Lee, Tom Wayman, Milton Acorn and certain other living writers constitutes a sub-tradition of particular richness and anger. Yet in one respect at least, Atwood's choice is profoundly conservative. She takes no notice of the discoveries made by N. Brian Davis, whose book *The Poetry of the Canadian People, 1720-1920* (1976) opened up extensive new territory for readers as well as literary historians. Davis suggested that "by selecting only those poems written by a small group of professionals, mainly middle-class men and women, and by passing these poems off as a representative sample, virtually every editor to date has presented a completely false picture of Canadian society and sensibilities". To be sure, much of Davis's material is polemical doggerel. But the anonymous song "A Lay of the Press", or Daniel Young's denunciation of "Child Labour", or the bitter, anonymous satire "We'll Own the Earth", or even the extraordinary rhyming petition offered by the workmen of New Brunswick in 1833 to protest against an oppressive law – any of these would

have graced the Oxford anthology more happily than some of the work which Atwood does print.

Her anthology also excludes Adam Allan's "Description of the Great Falls of the River St John", composed in 1798, a poem which at moments bears an uncanny resemblance to "Martian" work in present-day England:

Around the verge what curious objects rise
To feed the fancy end to feast the eyes!
Pilasters, arches, pyramids, and cones,
Turrets enriched with porticos and domes.

"To reach the significance", observed the critic R. E. Ransley with nationalist severity, "one must see the ice, not medieval stone-work . . . The result seems artificial or even absurd to the Canadian." The omission of Allan's verse is emblematic, for surprisingly few poets in Canada have felt at ease with fantasy, especially in the midst of a landscape poem. (In "One Rural Winter", Al Purdy describes himself as "surrounded by nothing but beautiful trees / and I hate beautiful trees".) Painful descriptions of an event are less likely to appear in English-Canadian poetry than are small myths about its origin and importance; the urge to interpret and explain still seems stronger than the mere desire to imagine. Yet many of the nation's writers have attained a intensity of feeling, a fluidity of tone, and a confidence in the value of their own perceptions that were rare among Canadian poets a little as thirty years ago.

It is the easiest thing in the world for a reviewer to quibble with an anthology's hard work. Nevertheless, a few specific points arising from Atwood's selection cannot go unmentioned. Her taste among the younger poets is doubtful; some of the entries in the final hundred or so pages are simply bad. In Canada the anthology has been attacked for its apparent bias towards poets from southern Ontario; several Toronto writers receive an extremely generous amount of space, while writers from other regions are under-represented or omitted at all. The absence of notes means that certain poems are bound to seem mysterious to a non-Canadian reader. For example, P. R. Scott's superb satire "W.L.M.K." (about a man who "never let his on the one hand / know what his on the other hand was doing") will baffle anyone who does not happen to know that a lonely spiritualist called William Lynde Mackenzie King served as Canada's prime minister for nearly a quarter of a century. Inexplicably the volume contains no index of titles or first lines.

In spite of these deficiencies, it provides readers and writers in foreign countries with their best available guide to the growth in Canadian poetry. "Canadian poetry must now be judged by achievement", Atwood observes in a terse, trenchant introduction; "it does not need to be civilized for not being like other poetries. It is not American or English poetry, *manqué* but a unique organism: spiky, tough, flexible, various, and vital." This anthology should provoke pleasure and surprise in many countries, not least in Britain, where mention of Canadian writing can still conjure up dreary images of Robert W. Service, Stephen Leacock and even (God help us) Mazo de la Roche. In truth, the work of the finest practicing Canadian poets – Purdy, Newlove, Szumigalski, Phyllis Webb, Margaret Avison, Michael Ondaatje, Atwood herself – can hardly stand comparison with that being produced in any other country where English is spoken.

Everyone Knows

In 1932 when I was ten.
In my grandmother's garden in Camberwell.
I saw a Camberwell Beauty butterfly
Sitting on a clump of Michaelmas daisies.
I recognized it because I'd seen a picture
Showing its brownish wings and creamy edges
In a boys' paper or on a cigarette-card
Earlier that week. And I remember thinking
What else would you expect? Everyone knows
Camberwell Beauties come from Camberwell.
That's why they're called that. I said I was ten.

KINGSLEY AMIS

Against the narrative grain

Lorna Sage

ELIZABETH BISHOP
The Collected Prose
Edited by Robert Giroux
278pp. Chatto and Windus/Hogarth Press.
£12.95.
07011 28097

When a major poet leaves an oeuvre as rich and (relatively) slender as Elizabeth Bishop's, we're bound to look for more – for the poet in the letters or (as here) the poet in the prose. It's a paradoxical urge, however, for all its seeming naturalness, and one can see why editor Robert Giroux felt (he confesses) relieved to find evidence that Elizabeth Bishop had herself at least thought of collecting her "Stories & Essays" (?), even though she'd obviously meant to exclude some of the more important pieces he includes. For while it would be nonsense to say that for her prose was the enemy of poetry, there is a sense in which her pectoris and spatial obsessions – let alone her personal relictions – are threatened by the business of storytelling.

Or to put it another way, she couldn't really write fiction. The "stories" printed here are mainly memoirs, and of those that aren't one ("The Farmer's Children") is an embarrassing fairy-tale, and the others – her earliest surviving prose pieces, "The Baptism", "The Sea & Its Shore" and "In Prison", published in the late 1930s – are allegories about finding one's vocation. The style is reminiscent of Poe or Hawthorne, plus an extra touch of twentieth-century paranoia. According to Mr Giroux, she described them with characteristic festiveness, in a letter to Marianne Moore, as "these horrible 'fable' ideas that seem to obsess

me". They have in fact a certain lurid wit: "In Prison", for instance, yearns crazily, in a male first person, to be incarcerated for good in the prisonhouse of language:

Writing on the Wall: I have formulated very definite ideas on this important aspect of prison life, and have already composed sentences and paragraphs (which I cannot give here) I hope to be able to describe on the walls of my cell. First, however . . . I shall read very carefully (or try to read, since they may be partly obliterated, or in a foreign language) the inscriptions already there . . .

"The Sea & Its Shore", in similar vein, imagines a drunken refuse-collector possessed by the "literature" that litters his beach:

Either because of the insect armies of type so constantly besieging his eyes, or because it was really so, the world, the whole world he saw, came before many years to seem printed, too . . . The sand itself, if he picked some of it up and held it close to one eye . . .

These "fables" about the insanity and bliss of one's calling seem to have stopped once she found her poetic voice and, as it were, her own beach to comb. The later pieces – muffled over, some of them, for years – are about people, pieces, herself. In more-or-less naturalistic style.

Giroux's most substantial finds are "Primer Class" and "The Country Mouse", written probably in 1960-1 and unpublished before, which describe her first experience of school, in Canada, where she lived with her Nova Scotian grandparents, and her brief and unsuccessful transplantation to her other, wealthier (Worcester, Massachusetts) grandparents. Behind both memoirs, in bunched fashion, lies the loss of her parents. Going to school, at first, rouses fears of further desertions:

My grandmother had a glass eye, blue, almost like her other one, and this made her especially vulnerable and precious to me. My father was dead and my mother was away in a sanatorium. Until I was tened

out of it, I used to ask Grandmother, when I said goodbye, in promise me not to die before I came home . . .

"Primer Class", however, maintains a lucid, humorous distance from her orphaned childhood. With "The Country Mouse" the style of reticence is shakier, as she describes the sense of displacement, the allergies and illness that overtook her when her sterner, alternative grandparents tried to turn her into "a nice little girl". She learns self-consciousness and self-dislike: a mirror reveals "my ugly serge dress, my too long hair, my gloomy and frightened expression"; talking to another child she finds herself claiming, lyingly, "in e sentimental voice", that her sick mother "died, too", and finally, homily, she realizes that this "false" person is her – "I felt I, I, I . . . inside my scabby body and wheezing lungs . . . Why was I a human being?" This is one of the few prose episodes that made its way recognizably into a poem ("In the Waiting Room" in *Geography III*, 1976) and the contrast is revealing. In both memoir and poem the child is sitting in a dentist's waiting room, waiting for her aunt, but while the memoir has her looking at a copy of the *National Geographic* and noticing the date (February 5, 1918, three days before her birthday), the poem takes her further, inside the magazine's covers, where she stares fascinated at volcanoes, cannibals, "Babies with pointed heads" and black women with "muffled hanging breasts". The question "Why was I a human being?" takes on a very different resonance as a result:

How – I didn't know any word for it – how "unlikely" . . .

Not that the pain of "I, I, I" is deflected, but it echos in a much wider, more vivid world than the memoir's focus can manage.

The poet was suspicious of "history" and "perspective", preferred the art of surfaces and

the metaphors of mops. Several of the less personal pieces here – like "Gregorio Valdes" (about a primitive painter she met in Key West), and her introduction to her translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* (a diary kept by a Brazilian girl in the 1890s) stress just this absence of "depth" as a special, almost magical virtue in their subjects' work. The *Diary* introduction, revisiting "Helena's" landscapes, focuses deliberately on "unlikelihood":

The church has settled and everything is now as new. As in many old Brazilian churches, the ceilings are made of narrow boards, so that the scenes from the Life of the Virgin painted on them, copied from heaven knows what hand-me-down sources, are scored through by black lines. These ceilings have a sad appeal, like letters written in old copybook handwriting on lined paper.

In the same way, she is charmed to discover, when the paint cracks on one of Gregorio Valdes's still lifes, that "The blue background extended all the way and . . . showed through the fruit. Apparently he had felt that since the wall was back of the fruit he could paint it there . . ." One of the "stories", "Memories of Uncle Neddy", slyly rejoices in the thought that her Nova Scotian uncle's portrait, hanging in her Brazilian house, will be bound to grow mildew – "I have the black shadow, like the finest soil, that suddenly shows up" – and indeed the mildew provides a kind of magic patina through which she glimpses the doubtful moral fibre of the "real" uncle. In this "story-telling" against the narrative grain you can indeed see the poet in the prose. Her memoir of Marianne Moore, "Efforts of Affection", is nearly all foreground, as if, in a marvellous phrase from one of the poems, perspective was "dozing". *The Collected Prose* is a fitting "companion volume" to last year's *Complete Poems* not because it's equally live, but because it maps out so exactly where she did live.

The exile at home

John Gledson

CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE
Nava Realidade
Two volumes, 960pp. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio.
EMANUEL BRASIL and WILLIAM JAY SMITH
(Editors)
Brazilian Poetry 1950-1980
187pp. Harper and Row. £21.50.
08195 50752

In October 1982, when Carlos Drummond de Andrade had his eightieth birthday, the public celebrations – balloons over Copacabana beach, poems showered from the air over Belo Horizonte, the capital of his native state, as well as more conventional newspaper and television adulation – might have found some echo outside Brazil. They found very little, and the loss is all our own. Drummond (pronounced Drummond, the name he is known by, and whose origins in Brazil go back through the history of the Portuguese empire) has, I should have thought, an unassailable claim to be thought of as the greatest poet still living and writing in Latin America. These two large volumes – 955 pages of poetry, nineteen collections, nearly a thousand poems – contain all the poetry he has thought worthy of publication in book form, apart from some volumes of occasional and journalistic verse, which are given in selection at the end of the second volume.

Why has Drummond not achieved the fame of Neruda, Vallejo or Paz, say? The answers tell us something about ourselves as readers of poetry, and as "consumers" of news and views about Latin America. The places and situations he deals with are far too like our own. Itabira, the small interior town where he was brought up, and whose social life preoccupies him so much in three relatively recent collections together, entitled *Botimpo* (Oxline) was, at least in many respects, like any small British country town of the early part of the century. Equally, the Rio de Janeiro he now inhabits, and which is the setting of the poems of collections of the 1940s like *Sentimento do Mundo* (A Feeling of the World) and *A Rosa do Povo* (The People's Rose) is not essentially different from any other large city. Is it that we

lar (Phillip Larkin, Elizabeth Bishop . . .) but still at bottom require exoticism from those writing in foreign languages? In fact Bishop, whose poetry about Brazil (the fruit of twenty years' familiarity with the country) shows so much genuine understanding and fellow-feeling for the country and its inhabitants, was a great admirer and a fine translator of Drummond's poetry – her versions are still the best approach-road for the English-speaking reader, though the much larger selection of Virginia de Araujo (*The Minus Sign*, Manchester, 1981) is accurate and often ingenious.

Drummond's poetry is so varied both in form and theme that it is impossible to give a representative sample of it to be, and always has been, confident without being over-bearing, so that themes about which we thought we had heard everything – social commitment and class guilt, love, nostalgia for the past – are given new life. Indeed, along with a very few other poets of Brazilian modernism, of whom the most considerable was Manuel Bandeira, he has given expression to everyday feelings – and it is, in the last resort, this which explains the public enthusiasm (and Bishop's). His permanent scepticism and irony give validity to this emotional expression, for he never (or almost never) claims too much. "I give minimal hope to a few", as he says in *A Rosa do Povo* (1945), the most confident collection of his career, whose climax is the magnificent "Song

to the man of the people, Charlie Chaplin", a hymn to the ability of ordinary man (and of the artist in particular) to escape pre-established codes of communication and reach a common humanity. "Cisma" (Staring) is a childhood memory from the first volume of *Botimpo* (1968); it balances joy and menace in a frozen moment, as if the poet were unable to decide between them (the translation is my own):

This coffee-bush, only one, in the clear afternoon
and its shadow, a child's shadow, throws
among red globules.

Sitting, I see the world
open and reopen its fan of images.
What luxury, to live in time and out of it.
Look, coming slowly down the trunk, to sink,
staring, into my dream, the total dream,
ecstatic sculptured band, a coral-snake.

Drummond's original commitment (in 1930), with a book simply entitled *Alguma Poesia* (Some Poetry), was to irony and minimal statement, and that irony has remained constant in his later career. The development of a cutting edge so soon might have been dangerous – for irony is an instrument which can easily become blunted with use, or self-destructive when turned on the user. The truth is that Drummond was always aware of such problems, and never assumed ironic positions lightly; an article written as early as 1924 savaged Anatole France for purveying comfortable scepticism. But this mixture of wisdom and modesty has made his poetry a difficult

inheritance for his successors to assimilate; the best poet of the succeeding generations is João Cabral de Melo Neto, whose sharp, precisely calculated realism avoids any autobiographical reference, where Drummond has always written overtly from his own point of view.

To quote a phrase from Cabral, Drummond is an "incomformado conformista": like Machado de Assis – a writer who has also proved notoriously difficult for succeeding generations to tame – and such other great figures of Brazilian literature as Graciliano Ramos and Guimarães Rosa, he is forced to a tragic and ironic realism by his critique of a society from which, nevertheless, he refuses to exile himself. Like Machado again, Drummond has never left South America. In this attitude to exile, of which Drummond's popularity is one form, lies, I suspect, one of the fundamental differences between the Brazilian and Spanish American literary traditions.

Brazilian Poetry (1950-1980) is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Bishop; one of its editors, Emanuel Brasil, collaborated with her in an *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry* in 1972. This successor volume is more limited in scope. It is really an anthology of a generation or a group – thus Drummond, Cabral and numerous other older poets, who wrote much of their best work in the period in question, are excluded. So too are poets like Carlos Nejar, who are of the age of those anthologized, but not of the same group. This is not to cast aspersions on the poems included or on the translations, which me by and large excellent. The São Paulo concrete poets, already relatively familiar to foreign readers, are here, and so is Ferreira Gullar, whose long *Poema Sujo* (Dirty Poem) was a best-seller in 1976, during the slow process of the lifting of censorship – the introduction, by the way, which is not the best thing in the book, glosses over the terrible traumas Gullar and many others went through in the late 1960s and early 70s. For me, the greatest pleasure in the book is the complex but marvellously lyrical poems of Mário Faustino, but there is interest and variety to be found elsewhere, and it is fascinating to see the last poet in the volume, Lindolfo Bell, struggling with Drummond's heritage – even if the results are not entirely convincing. While not such a revelation as the earlier volume, *Brazilian Poetry (1950-1980)*

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FORMS AND INFLUENCES

We asked a number of poets the following question: "Which work or works of literature have had the greatest or most enduring effect on your own understanding of poetic form, and in which respects?" Their replies are printed below.

Fleur Adcock

Understanding comes through example and imitation. The first two books of poetry I bought for myself (at fifteen) were Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909-1935* and Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*. Eliot's revelation that poetry could be in free forms and that these themselves involved discipline, of a different kind, provided a healthy shock and did something towards weaning me from Donne's patterned artificialities, to which I was and am instinctively attracted. Further illumination came from Latin poets - Catullus, Horace, Propertius - who showed me that rigid formal conventions need not restrict originality. I didn't, though, feel compelled to write in sapphics and alcaics. Probably the poet who most influenced my own practice, in my twenties, was Graves; but his directness and uncompromising oddity, combined with technical elegance, are perhaps matters of tone and style rather than form: these things tend to overlap.

Kingsley Amis

You seem to be asking which works of literature have influenced me as a poet. But I am uniquely unable to tell you; only a plagiarist or a parodist can name his literary sources. Anybody, of course, can find resemblances. Such understanding of poetic form as I may possess cannot be put into words, except in so far as I have already, in an indirect and unconscious way, put it into the words of the poems I have written. The most I could do would be to make a list of poets I have read, but it would not differ much from anyone else's at my time. I should perhaps add that works of scholarship and criticism have taught me what to call a line of ten syllables (or five "feet"), and things like that.

Alan Brownjohn

(1) T. S. Eliot's *Selected Poems* (the first Penguin edition) and Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (bought because it was excreted in a tabloid newspaper). They proved to me at eighteen that there was no overriding need to (i) bother with rhyme, (ii) cultivate stanza forms, (iii) listen to metres, and (iv) count feet - let alone (v) count syllables. They meant freedom from the form one was given to believe was inexorably there because teachers were so determined to demonstrate it. Essays by Herbert Read on "the true voice of feeling" confirmed this freedom later. (2) W. H. Auden's *Poems and Look, Stranger* then proved that there was an overriding need to do all of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), and also consider the shape and spacing of the poem on the page, vary line-lengths, use indentations, etc.: the visual aspect. (3) Marianne Moore's *Collected Poems* proclaimed (v) the counting of syllables.

Tom Disch

As a Junior at Central High School in St Paul, Minnesota, I set out to memorize a thousand lines of poetry, and surely those poems and chunks of poems would provide the longest-lasting templates of poetic form: assorted soliloquies of Shakespeare (but only from the tragedies), Keats's Odes and sonnets, all "The Ancient Mariner", and lots of *The Rubáiyat* and Edgar Allan Poe. But much as I loved bombast, I loved neatness more, and there was nothing so neat as Alexander Pope. That same year (1955) I read - and regretted as a school essay - a book about Pope's prosody, and for a long time that was all I knew and all I needed to know. I did read contemporary poets for what they had to say, but I didn't turn

D. J. Enright

Early Pound (epigrams, *Cathay*). Walcy, and miscellaneous translations of (eg) Cavafy and Brecht, along with an innate aversion to "good form", authority, law and order etc, had considerable effect on my understanding (if that's the right word) of formlessness - and subsequently the difficulty of making some sort of rhythmic sense out of "free verse". Sonnets and quatrains might have proved a more profitable study, but such things, at that time, were not to be. The watchword was: "Verse as speech!"

Gavin Ewart

As a teenager, at the age of sixteen or so, I first met the poetry of T. S. Eliot. This, while not being exactly free verse (see the intermittently rhyming "Rhapsody" and "Preludes"), first gave me ideas as to how formal stanzaic verse could be modified. *The Waste Land* would be the work that influenced me most. This was closely followed by Auden's *Poems* of 1930. Of course, a tone and a style also came with the realization that poetry could be written in different ways. For some years now I have consciously tried to match the "theme" of any new poem with a suitable form. *Vers libre*, syllabics, prose poems, rhymed stanzas, haikus, even doggerel: they all have their merits in different circumstances.

Roy Fuller

My first notion of poetic form was obtained as a schoolboy in the 1920s from "traditional" poets. A little later the *vers libre* of the Sitwells and others led me astray. Edgell Rickword and the 1930 Auden proved that one could be "modern" yet traditional, and I have stuck to that concept ever since. Of course, *vers libre* and syllabics are not ruled out, but the stiff discipline required in writing poetry comes most, for me, from traditional form.

Thom Gunn

(1) Shakespeare's plays! A metrical tune will haunt me for days, sometimes, before I can fill it out with words (the last time this happened, it was "Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once"). (2) W. C. Williams, whose tone many English people profess they cannot bear. (3) Pound's *Cantos*, which start with "And" and never end, certainly have had "an enduring affect on my understanding of poetic form" as the work no longer necessarily enclosed, but I have not been able (yet, anyway) to adapt that understanding to my own needs and practice. (I would like to: it is fun to enrage the reviewers.)

Peter Levi

Since the deepest influences on one's ideas of form are likely to be unconscious, and to occur early in life, I can only guess what they were in my own case. At six or seven I started reading Shakespeare, and I dare say took some garbled sense of the line and the long sentence from him, which has flowered, after severe pruning, much later in life. I also read Hardy very early, and from him learnt something about rhyme schemes and stanza forms. Through knowing Hardy, I became enkindled by Horace's odes when I was fifteen. For many years I was bemused by the subtle sound patterns and constructive forms (seldom the same twice, and never identical with metrical form) in Horace's odes, and consciously tried to learn from him, but without success. Music and song are real but imponderable influences. Apart from an occasional essay by Lorca about *duende*, Fraenkel's Horace is still the best book I know about poetic form. Renaissance works of theory about poetic form are amusing but unhelpful; yet I think the sonnet is still a buried

Andrew Motion

Easily the most formative influence on my feelings about form has been Edward Thomas. It's a long time since I wanted to rhyme poems at the end of lines (in kind of buckshot method seems more involving, and less likely to sound "light"), so Thomas couldn't help me a great deal in that respect. But I've tried never to forget other lessons he taught - particularly how to create a tension between the unit that a line represents, the unit that a sentence represents, and the unit that a stanza represents. Thomas is a poet-master at delicately teasing out his sentences, making them peer round the end of lines, so as to produce the impression of someone cautiously and scrupulously thinking as he writes. It's a marvellously subtle realization of his friend Robert Frost's theory about "the sound of sense". But it's an aspect of form which changes the word's definition so radically from my first understanding of it - I was originally given a dose of the Saintsbury-Bridges legacy: inflexible metres and rigid rhyme-schemes - that it might be something else altogether. Perhaps there isn't such a thing as "form", only "forms", endlessly and variously appropriate; or otherwise, as readily conceived as shapes as they are as noises, and liable to seem as ambiguous and multiple as the meaning to which they are (always) indispensable.

Paul Muldoon

The Yard

Since in a net I seek to hold the wind with which my father once made it half tame
O change thy thought, that I may change my mind
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endangering art

thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart
agus calsmrlt Bheorla I inbeol gach oin
au brúit des corillons qui chentent dans la brume
fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

All metaphor, Malachi, sulis and all, A barnacle goose
is of the slightest bondage made aware,
To trap the unicorn in every case

was the lockhouseable adventure of a gravelled yard.

What has a bird to do with the poultry yard?
I couldn't rest from hell just anywhere.

Tom Paulin

Twenty years ago, at school in Belfast, I heard a record of Robert Frost reading "After

Art History: The Surreal

We dreamed very wide awake
those days, for obedience's sake

In the suburb of Surreals
hoise families board the airline bus
to sell packages of phlegm.
My notebook is hugely swollen.
For some reason I am American.

Such dreaming is enforceable.
Everyone became guarded;
a tinkling of symbols was heard.
It's the West occupying the dreamworld
because the East has captured reason,
some said. Many ceased to listen.

In fact we'd gone to the dreamworld
for supplies of that instant
paint of the twilight kingdom
which colours every object
supernal, deeply important.

Apple-Picking". At around the same time I happened on a few pages of Frost's prose in a paperback called *Modern Poets On Poetry*. The cadences of Frost's verse, his New England accent, and his belief in what he terms "sentence sound", were for me the first and most enduring recognition of poetic form. For Frost, a poem is "a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung". He points to the vitality of common speech and insists that the poet must cut sentence sounds from the vernacular, where they're minted fresh every minute of the day. From Frost, I saw the way to Wyatt, Donne, Browning, Hardy, Hopkins, Edward Thomas, or what I call the "gothic" tradition of English verse - ie, poems which are formally spiky and sbrasive, like the accents I like most.

Peter Porter

A nearly impossible question to answer, since we are all influenced as much by works we have not used as models as we are by poems we admire and would like to have written. Also, the past, and the deep past, affect what is produced today more than anyone lets on. It may be pompous but it is likely to be true to say that one's work has been moulded by what Donne did with stanzas, the Earl of Rochester with couplets, or Byron with loose satire. Meanwhile, I can point to poets whose work has been a source of stimulation formally to me, if form is stretched to include sensibility. Auden clearly, for showing that traditional structures still have mileage in them, but also (the early Auden) for his demonstration of authority *à la* *generis* - the poet may make lasting shapes without knowing how or why. Then Wallace Stevens, for form as a kind of lunacy. You may not share his temperament but you can feel his spirit. The fact that Auden and Stevens hardly admired each other gives pliancy to this juxtaposition. Oddities, too, precisely for their oddity - Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* for the excitement of listing. Lastly, the influence of music and, less easy to demonstrate, painting. Analogies in the arts are perilous, but music, with its devices of thematic contrast and development, offers the poet an escape from formal logic and the arguments proper to rhetoric. I am also grateful to John Ashbery for illustrating that poetry does not have to make complete sense. But I continue to like those poets who think it should.

Craig Raine

The question is a dog. There is no such thing as poetic form. There are poetic forms: sestinas, sonnets, limericks, the standard babble. What Eliot called the esthetic of a poem is, by definition, individual to each poem - and so my answer is that I have learned from all the

Surreals

Exposed to the common air, I weathered quickly to the taste of affectless weird despair, elegant barely contained anger our new patrons demanded. when we had trained them to it.

False dreamings are imperial but we couldn't disappoint them (few others now read us by choice. Woolf Woolf our master's voice).

To be fair, many of us had now joined the creative class and become our masters - but the paint, when stolen and breathed straight from the tin gave a noble deathly rush that ensnared imagination.

LES A. MURRAY

A SYMPOSIUM

poetry I have read and all the poetry I have written. Two examples: James Fenton's "Lines for Translation into any Language", takes its form from the examination paper; Christopher Reid's "A Whole School of Bourgeois Primitives" is written in stripes. The next time you conduct a survey, I suggest you ask us all to define "fancy", a term you seem to think current and meaningful, since it pops up now and then in TLS poetry reviews - to my puzzlement.

Peter Reading

Paradise Lost, in that it clearly defined iambic pentameter but demonstrated a sinuous freedom available within strict discipline. Frost's use of the same metre, for its casual ease but adherence to structure. All Hopkins flabbergasted me (still does) for explosive vigour strengthened by rigorous, odd, appropriate structural law. H. B. Cottrell's (1911) translation of the *Odyssey*, in that it made what I felt to be a classical hexameter equivalent (incorporating accentual and quantitative considerations) without snuffing silly-quant but vigorous, fast-moving, modulated, conversational - with the dignified distancing of order throughout. All Auden, for all the above qualities and the idea that "Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, / force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self."

Peter Redgrove

Four Quarters: (a) via the "terza-rima" with alternating masculine and feminine endings of *Little Gidding* II, to poring over innumerable translations of Dante, including the impressive unrhymed Sisson, the partly-rhymed Ciardi, the exact yet unsatisfactory rhymed Binyon and better, Bickelsteth, but not the Miltonics of Cary; towards developing a triadic stanza of my own, I thought deliberately, but now suspect, because of a remark by Professor Bradbrook to a review (*Temenos* 4); that it was also the sea, by which I live, entering: "Its pulse is that of the wave that runs forward, breaks, draws back"; and was also yoga breathing getting lo, which is a triple pulse too, plus a silence with the lungs empty, like the pause between stanzas; (b) via the stress-stress Eliot flows to Langland and the possibility of the dream or visionary poem employing language as emphatic, earthy, free and exact as that of waking life, and preferably more so.

Carol Rumens

The concept of "enduring effect" doesn't mean much to me. The literature that affected my sense of poetic form yesterday may not affect it today, and what affects it today may not affect it tomorrow. The most honest way to answer this question is to list the books I'm reading/using now, excluding review books. They are: Max Hayward's *Writers in Russia*, *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse*, Mandelstam's *Poems*, James Grosson, *Forbes' Russian Grammar*, Hugo's *Russian Dictionary*, *The Gateway Russian Song Book*, H. Skrobuchev's *Icons*, V. Kuprianov's *From the First Person*, Eric Berne's *What do you say after you say Hello?* Celan's *Collected Poems*, tr Mahad Hamburger, Elizabeth Bartlett's *Stranger Territory*, *The Private Eye Story*, Ruth Prauer Jhabvala's *How I became a Holy Mother*, Heda Margolina's "I do not want to remember", Russell Hoban's *Pilgermann*, Marshall Berman's *All that is solid melts into air*, John Bayley's *The Uses of Division*, and *Test Yourself - A handbook of self-analysis based on modern psychological methods*.

C. H. Sisson

"At Killybegs there was no weathercock." But I'll have to try to give an answer, perhaps the least misleading one would be: the poems of T. E. Hulme. By that I mean that it was in reading those small works that it came to me with blinding clarity that the poem is only what the rhythm will hold and that the words that come should be chosen for their most outside effect.

And what should the rhythm be? It is what is given with the first lines of the poem and goes on from there. It is something without which the meaning cannot be conveyed. It can live within a complicated verse-form and must probably always have reference to some historically-grown line - pentameter, octosyllabic or whatever. For the poet as for the language, the only possibility is to go on from where he (it) happens to be.

Stephen Spender

I suppose that the Romantics, particularly Keats, influenced me first. Then, when I was an undergraduate, what I call the line-by-line poetry of early Auden (each line almost a separate poem). Also, when I was an undergraduate, I recognized something hand-made and honestly homered together in the poems of Robert Graves. (I was interested much later when he told me that a few lines would come into his head, in certain rhyme scheme, which he took as a pattern for the rest of the poem.) I suppose that stretches of Wordsworth's *Prelude* are the poetry I most admire as form. In them Wordsworth follows a rhythm which extends beyond the lines, as it were zig-zag, or like lightning, across a whole passage. It is the rhythm of his passion but it also seems definable within its iambic-pentameter limits. It does not seem completely *per se*, like the rhythms of Walt Whitman or D. H. Lawrence, which draw attention only to their author's unique genius. For me, trying to discover my own inner rhythm and yet relate it to a scale which seems objective and which other people recognize as "right" seem the important things. Rhythm is form, I see this in painting and sculpture as much as in poetry so that I could say I was influenced in my ideas of form in poetry by Beethoven and by Henry Moore - or would be glad to think this.

Anne Stevenson

My sister recently sent me a snippet out of my American high school magazine, reminding me that in my early teens I only wrote ballads and sonnets. This one, when I was about sixteen.

We watched the colors on a changing sky
While talking. Someone spoke of poetry.
And envied pleasure's worded ecstasy
And sorrow's spoken tears. Reflecting, I
Too wished that I could recognize
My language in the sun-made colors there,
And write a worded glory to compare
With that a scarlet sun can improvise.

Later, when alone, I thought of you,
Recalling how you watched quite silently,
Not needing tongue or words to crystallize
Emotion. Thinking of you then, I knew
That greatest poets write no poetry
But speak some silent language with the skies.
Yeats's "Adam's Curse" and "The Polly of Being Comforted?" And Frost's "Spring Pools", "Meeting and Passing" (lovely poems). At eighteen I discovered *The Waste Land* and *Prufrock*, though I still wrote a *Maque for Dancing* in Elizabethan form, when I was at the University of Michigan. I never really was a "modern" until I read Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map" and "Roosters" in my late twenties. Even now, the pull is back to Yeats.

Anthony Thwaite

Anglo-Saxon riddles and Rupert Brooke started me writing poetry in my teens, closely followed by *The Waste Land* and George Barker. But I think that, after this eclectic brew, the poet who seemed a tallman then, and continues to seem so now, is George Herbert. Herbert's combination of plainness and power, working within a great variety of stanzaic and rhythmic forms, is a model of how to think in verse. I don't suppose that, in 1984, one can learn many direct lessons from him; but the pattern he set and the comfort he gives are important and necessary. Much of what I write probably has nothing to do with Herbert - baggier, or lighter, or more informal. But his example within meter is essential.

Litry lions devour Harvard books.

The Odes of John Keats

Helen Vendler
"Vandlor's treatment of the Odes, the kornel of Keats's poetic achievement, is so masterly that it will become the standard by which others are judged."
-Times Literary Supplement
Balknap 0-674-53075-0 £15.70

Of Mind and Other Matters

Nelson Goodman
With insights derived from both formal philosophy and cognitive psychology, Goodman discusses topics ranging from science policy to narrative in literature and painting.
0-674-63125-0 £14.85

Revolution in Time

Clocks and the Making of the Modern World
David S. Landes
"Ambitious and learned... The peculiarly European power over Time which Landau links with the craft skills of watchmaking in various countries of Europe, is excellently described."
-The Sunday Times
Balknap 0-674-76800-0 £17.00

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This vivid description of Frescobaldi's career paints a picture of musical life in seventeenth-century Italy. This is the first full-length book on Frescobaldi in English, and the most complete in any language.
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The final decade
Edited by Katie Louchheim
Lively, first-hand accounts from those movers and shakers who made the New Deal.
"A stunning mix of anecdote and sharp personal glimpses... of an extraordinary time."
-Los Angeles Times
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John J. Richetti
John Richetti suspends purely philosophical questions to analyze the writing strategies of these great eighteenth-century philosophers.
0-674-66482-5 £20.00

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Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt
John Milton Cooper, Jr.
"A masterful portrait of two of [America's] most intriguing Presidents."
-New York Times Book Review
Balknap 0-674-94780-9 £17.00

Beowulf

The Poem and Its Tradition
John D. Niles
John Niles offers a new view of the first great work of English literature and the native poetic tradition from which it arose. His lucid commentary analyzes the poem's style, meaning, and historical context.
0-674-68725-8 £23.35

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125 Buckingham Palace Road
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Letters

'The Gypsy Language'

Sir, - Yanko le Redzoscio (Letters, April 13) doth pretest too much in his criticism of your reviewer: his accusation of "little knowledge" (his own misquotation) is dang'rous indeed in its boomerang potential.

Amongst other things he objects to the derivation of the word *rom* (Romani for "Gypsy") from a Sanskrit word "for a person of low caste". He cites as an "equally plausible and certainly less negative" source the Sanskrit *rama*, "husband". In fact *rama* does not mean "husband"; there is a word *rama* (with short vowel) which does, but only as a development of the meaning "lover", derived from the verb *ram*, "to enjoy (carnally)". It is true, though not mentioned by your correspondent, that in some Romani dialects *rom* means "man, husband", but the vowel precludes derivation from *rama* (or *rama*). The usual derivation from Sanskrit *dom*, on the other hand, accepted by such an expert on historical phonology as the late Sir Ralph Turner, is entirely normal (one may compare Romani *rol*, "spoon", with Hindi etc *dol*): the origin is more patently recognizable, as Professor Gropin notes in his review, in Palestinian Romani *dom* (like *dowl* for "wooden spoon" in that dialect). The Sanskrit word refers in particular to a caste of musicians, and may be connected with the words for "drum" in the non-Aryan Munda dialects. The word is still represented, as *dom* or *dum*, in many of the modern languages of India, referring variously to castes of wandering musicians, drummers, basket-makers etc.

The adjectival form (eg. in Welsh Romani) is *romano*, plural *romani* - also feminine as in *romani* *clib*, "Gypsy language" (*chib* from Sanskrit *rajā*, "king" (and his wife is a *ranī*), more elevated origins, a "Gypsy gentleman" is *romano* *ral* ("Romany Rye"), where *ral* is from Sanskrit *rajā*, "king" (and his wife is a *ranī*). Unkindly perhaps, the Nepali equivalent of "Après moi le déluge" is "When I am dead, let a Dom be king (*ghural rajā*)". But it may console Romanophiles to know that our affectionate term "pal" is borrowed from the Romani word for "brother", itself derived quite regularly from Sanskrit *bhrātā* (cf. Romani *devel*, "God", from Sanskrit *devatā* = Latin *deus*), and so cognate with our own "brother".

W. SIDNEY ALLEN,
Trinity College, Cambridge.

'Cub'

Sir, - Irony is not irony if everyone can see the red flag (T. G. Rosenthal, Letters, April 13). The point is that its presence is signalled only covertly and implicitly. Thus, it works by grouping its readers into those (right, enlightened) who spot it and those (wrong, naïve) who do not. The covert red flag depends on two things that lie outside the surface reference of the words on the page: first, context; second, the reader's expectation of the implied author's stand.

Gavin Ewart's examples (Letters, April 13) from Shakespeare and Dickens are unhelpful because everyone knows that characters in dramatic and novelistic fictions "are" not their authors; the same is not obvious for the personae of poetry, which very often represent versions of self rather than versions of the other. Context is not only generic. It is also physical (and social); and in this case what has occurred is that some TLS readers have inveighed against

a paper they expect to represent the liberal intelligentsia for apparently endorsing crude racism, while others have defended their paper as being sufficient context to prove that the poem must have been ironic, ie. liberal and intelligent, not antisemitic.

Thus we fall into two groups - those who deem the context of the TLS a sufficient red flag, and those who don't. I read the poem in the same way as Peter Holland, and I'm certain I am not alone. I think I am the sort of person who reads the TLS but, on looking at "Cub", I became uncertain whether the TLS was still the sort of paper I read. The point is that irony is based in assumptions, about who we are and who authors and editors are, which is subliminal organizers of the act of reading. Knowing that I could not agree with the racist views of the last few lines of "Cub", I have the choice between two equations. Either I equal the author of the poem, therefore it is ironic and the persona is left condemned by us both. Or I am left outside, condemning an author and a persona who agree with each other. In both cases I align the editor with the author he or she appears to endorse, and I then either write a letter like Peter Holland's or one like T. G. Rosenthal's.

The real point is not that Peter Holland is "impudent" - an impudent term which only indicts Eric Korn (Letters, April 13), unless of course he is using it ironically - but that my second aspect of the red flag, the reader's expectation of the implied author's stand, depends on the imprecise and unstable assumption we might make about what the liberal intelligentsia of 1980s Britain happens to think about Lebanon. Why should I, or anyone, assume that a poet publishing a text which voices antisemitic views, put frequently in slightly less torrid form by plenty of our media, is likely to be expressing my disquiet about those media rather than agreeing with them? I cannot, simply, be sure enough that my view on Middle East politics is enough of a norm for the TLS to be sure to espouse it.

Irony, then, is not some fine and private thing that literary people enjoy; it is a political device which groups writers and readers by the implication of judgment that it prescribes. Your readers have been grouped.

NAOMI SEAL,
Queens' College, Cambridge.

Sir, - Despite the defence of Peter Reading's poem, "Cub", by distinguished correspondents, including his own publisher (Letters, April 13), there still remain a few unanswered questions.

1) Can you, the poet or any of his defenders seriously believe that Reuters employ "cub" reporters or that, if they did, they would send one on such a dangerous and complex assignment as the war in Lebanon? This is a crucial point for on it hinges the credibility of the explanation that the word "cub" is supposed to apply to the reporter as well as to the child gunman. Indeed, it is that which is supposed to give the poem its character of a dramatic monologue and thus distinguish it from the distilled personal experience of the poet. How, in fact, is the reader supposed to tell the difference between Peter Reading's fictional "I" and the "I" of a genuine correspondent and poet such as James Fenton who could well wish to describe in poetry something he had witnessed as a reporter?

no friend, nor any rock nor foe, all one to me, all three
ganging, and trouble not may what, or as far
the reckoning me none of that friend, by the many mass
kill.

3 All the water le Wye cannot wash your majesty's
Welsh blood out of your pody; I can tell you that.

Competition No 177
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the
three quotations which follow and to send us the
answers so that they reach this office not later than
May 15. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct
set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the
most nearly correct - in which case inspired
guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 177" on the
envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, The
Times Literary Supplement, Priory House, St John's
Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results
will appear on May 25.

1. Navy, the old good, the old Dist. the good you will
not be plain call, Master Officer! That is a man
in better clothes than I am for me and you art in an
other one. I am a busy about beggers still
before to the old children.

2) Is it not manifest nonsense to cite Brown-
ing, for it was known that he was not married to
a Duchess, or to bring in Dickens for his Fagin
and Shakespeare for his Shylock, for in neither
case does the writer identify himself as the
character? For Gavin Ewart to pretend that the
poem's critics believe that every thought ex-
pressed by every character is the true opinion
of every author is to fudge the issue abomin-
ably and bring it down to a level where it could
only be taken seriously by illiterates.

3) T. G. Rosenthal's belief that the poem is a
Swiftian satire on Dahl-like attitudes does not
seem to be shared by either the poet or you
yourself, for nothing I have read of his or your
comments seems to bear out this view.

Poets are expected to be mere, not less sensi-
tive to the power and meaning of phrases, and
while it is true that other people than the Jews
were engaged in brutal Old Testament wars, it
is equally true that only the Jews are known - in
an admittedly frightful phrase - as "the people
of the Book", and that the Book in question is
the Old Testament.

Your readers can test for themselves who is
meant by the phrase, "Old Testament shitters".
If a National Front or Nazi publication
referred to the founder of, say, Reuters news
agency as "an Old Testament shitter" would it
occur to anyone that what was meant was that
Julius Reuter was an Arab?

And if those words can carry only one mean-
ing in an antisemitic journal why should it be
supposed that they carry a different meaning
when they appear elsewhere?

DAVID NATHAN,
16 Augustus Close, Brentford Dock, Brentford,
Middlesex.

Jonathan Swift

Sir, - In the course of his review (February 10)
of Irvn Ehrenpreis's biography of Swift, Denis
Donoghue writes: "It's not clear why Stella
held back from marrying William Tisdall when
he broached the question early in 1704; unless
she lived in hope that Swift would marry her." I
think that Swift's last letter of the *Journal to
Stella*, letter LXV, written in Chester on his
way back to Ireland, June 6, 1713, makes it
quite clear. At the end he wrote: "Mrs. Tisdall
is very big, ready to lay down. Her husband is
a puppy. Do his feet sink still? - The Letters to
Ireland go at so uncertain an Hour that I am
forced to conclude - farewell Md Md etc." Other
evidence suggests that Stella was too fastidious
a lady to marry a gentleman with such a
remarkable disability.

ELIS DILLON,
Los Robles, Apartment 42, 1 El Vedado Lane, Santa
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John Alcock is Professor of Zoology at Arizona State University.
Noel Annan is the author of *Leila Stephen: His thought and character in relation to his time, 1922*.
Malcolm Bowie's *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* appeared in 1978.
Julia Briggs's *This Stage-Play World: English literature and its background 1580-1625*, was published last year.
Roger Cardwell's books include *Figures of Reality: A perspective on the poetic imagination*, 1981.
Andrew Carpenter is Statutory Lecturer in English at University College, Dublin.
Vincent Carpanzano's study of white South Africans, *Waking*, will be published later this year.
Dennis Clouston is Reader in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury.
Terry Eagleton is the author of *Literary Theory: An introduction*, 1983.
David Fallows is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Manchester.
Kale Elit is lecturer in English at the University of Bristol.
Alan Forrest is the author of *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux, 1775*.
Peter de France's *Fernand Léger* was published last year.
John Gledhill is the author of *The Deceptive Realm of Machado de Assis: A dissenting view of Dom Casmurro*, 1984.
P. H. Greenwood's books include *The Haplochromine Fishes of the East African Lakes*, 1981.
Hugh Houghton is a lecturer in English at the University of York.
Julian Horton is the author of *Georg Büchner*, 1982.
Michael Holman's first collection of poems, *Nights in the Iron Hotel*, was published last year.
Emrys Jones is Reader in English at the University of Oxford.
Hugh Kenner's *A Cold Eye: Modern Irish writers* was published last year.
Christopher Norris is the author of *Deconstruction*, 1982.
Gabriel Pearson is Professor of Literature at the University of Essex.
J. Enoch Powell was Professor of Greek at the University of Sydney from 1937 to 1939.
H. C. Robbins-Landon's *Handel* will be published later this year.
Richard Sallis's books include *Lawrence, Hardy and American Literature*, 1972.
Tony Tanner is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.
C. Vile's *Spain Against History* at University College London, 1981.
Jeremy Vladeck is lecturer in Political Science at the University of Richmond, Virginia.

COMMENTARY

Opera without music

Emrys Jones

THOMAS OTWAY
Venice Preserv'd
Lyttelton Theatre

Peter Gill's production of *Venice Preserv'd* brings back to life a work that might have been thought irrecoverable. First staged in 1682 and 1982, but now justifies the action by suggesting that military judgment was more relevant than political authority. Thus the British Government had no alternative but to take the advice of the military to escalate hostilities in a series of actions culminating in the sinking of the Belgrano.

Neel Annan writes of the Cabinet judging that the point of no return had been reached and military solutions had to be sought. I should point out that we were not subject to cabinet government at the time, indeed the Cabinet did not meet for several weeks. More significantly, the recent information from Alexander Haig and Jeane Kirkpatrick shows the Peruvian peace proposals to have had at altogether greater status than Mrs Thatcher will admit.

Moreover, in order to maintain its political constituency in Britain, the Government was persistently and loudly proclaiming that it was merely using "minimum force to the pursuit of a diplomatic settlement". Subsequent evidence has shown this to be untrue and it is no good trying to suggest that such "misinformation" is inevitable in war. In these particular circumstances, if these facts had been known at the time, the Government might not have maintained the authority to continue its policies.

Finally, if military objectives really de ne supreme, then what contingency plans had been made to meet the crippling, or even the loss, of one of our aircraft carriers? In such circumstances the landings could not have taken place. Did contingency plans involve the release of the tactical nuclear weapons carried on certain Task Force ships? Indeed, in what manner and in what circumstances would an R-class (Polaris) missile submarine deployed south-west of Ascension Island have been used?

Lord Lewin has gone on record as saying that he could envisage circumstances in which he would have advised the first use of nuclear weapons. Could these have been the circumstances? How would Mrs Thatcher have reacted? As Noel Annan says, in military operations there comes a point of no return. Without wise political leadership that is indeed the problem.

PAUL ROGERS,
Deenfield, Hallas Road, Kirkburton, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire.

David Berry

International Book Fair of Radical, Black and Third World Books

The Third International Book Fair of Radical, Black and Third World Books was held in London from April 5 to 7. The Fair is now established as a major annual cultural event for the British black community. What was noticeable about the book exhibition was not so much the presence of several mainstream publishers among the roughly one hundred exhibitors, nor the many white librarians and teachers searching for new multi-cultural texts, but the ease with which black writers mingled with their readers, making the event as much a writers' as a publishers' fair.

Many of these writers are young and were born in Britain. A forum attended by 150 people developed two important themes of their work: their interest in using dialect and patois inspired by writers like Linton Kwesi Johnson, the Kenyan Ngũgĩ Wĩ Thiong'o and the West Indian "dub" poets; and the tension between writing from their own, often different experience and heritage, and voicing the common concerns of black internationalism.

As yet undisciplined by conventional publishers, the new black fiction is being published by the Fair's organizers, Begle L'Overture, New Beacon and Race Today, the original pioneers of black publishing and book-selling in

here the political situation in Venice, the tyranny and corruption of the ruling oligarchy, are no more than vaguely adumbrated. What matters is what occupies the foreground, the visible action onstage, and what this amounts to is a furious interplay of elemental passions, each one briefly and purely incarnated in one or other of the three principals. It is above all as a histrionic exhibition of "the passions" that *Venice Preserv'd* can be enjoyed.

Otway's plot is an amalgam of motifs from *Julius Caesar* and *Othello*, but these are absorbed into a highly personal system of feeling. Jaffier has married Belvidere, the daughter of a rich senator who has dishonored her; and new, three years later, they are destitute. His friend Pierre initiates him into a conspiracy to overthrow the state and massacre the ruling class. Jaffier, however, is persuaded by his wife to disclose the plot to the Senate on condition that the conspirators are spared, a condition which in fact the Senate violates; Jaffier has to endure not only Pierre's contempt but the knowledge that he has delivered his closest friend to torture and death. He finally wins back Pierre's love by killing him moments before he is to be executed.

The scenes which carry the play's emotional freight are the confrontations between Jaffier and Belvidere on the one hand and Jaffier and Pierre on the other. Jaffier, helplessly weak and hopelessly indecisive, is tugged now towards Belvidere, now towards Pierre, his wife embodying his love and tenderness and pity, his friend his idealism, his hatred of tyranny and his aspiration towards freedom. Otway's baroque rhetoric, with its abstract nouns and personification, its small vocabulary of simple charged words used repeatedly in different permutations, has a cumulative force: it gradually draws us into its frenetic play of unstable psychic pressures. And despite the unownness of Otway's style - his inspirational mode led him into occasional missteps - his play in performance has its triumphs, moments of truth which suddenly expose with startling effect the strength but also the ambiguity of his chief relationships. One such powerful moment was also in its time one of the most famous in the play (it is caught in Zoffany's painting of Garrick and Mrs Cibber, on view at the National Theatre as part of the Maughan Collection). It occurs late in the action when Jaffier, at his lowest point of self-loathing, resolves to stab his wife as the price of his betrayal of Pierre. His arm is raised to plunge the knife when she throws her arms around his neck. After a pause he again attempts to strike, but the impulse is trans-

formed into a murderously fierce embrace. The moment brings out Jaffier's latent hostility to his strong/weak wife as well as his passionate adoration of her.

Everything in the play's emotional world shifts and melts and re-forms in this way. The comic subplot concerns Antonio, an elderly and lecherous senator, and his mistress Aquilina. Their first scene turns on his masochistic desire to be treated literally like a dog: he goes on all fours and begs her to kick him. The scene is usually taken as a regrettable exercise, and has often been cut. But Otway shows later that Antonio is not the only groveller in the play: in his abject and agonizing shame, Jaffier goes on his knees before Pierre - in this production he is shown for a moment on all fours, like Antonio - and entreats his friend to subject him to further humiliations. There is in fact more than a suggestion of an erotic component in their friendship: in this the producer is merely following Otway's text. Love and friendship interpenetrate: Jaffier "loves" Pierre with an intensity usually found only in erotic relationships, while his wife claims to be his best "friend" herself: "Hast thou a friend more dear than Belvidere?"

Peter Gill's production presents all these issues with great clarity, and is boldly faithful to the play as a whole, giving it complete and uncut, with its evident weaknesses on show as well as its less obvious strengths; and he rightly takes it very fast. Michael Pennington (Jaffier) and Jane Lapotaire (Belvidere) attack their roles with ironic viciousness and stamina and with a constantly surprising range of feeling and intonation. Occasionally they have weak or even absurd things to say, but they speak them so unflinchingly and with such conviction that these potentially embarrassing passages do little damage. They both adopt a fluid gesticulatory neo-classical acting style, which helps to distance and aestheticize the

high-flown sentiments; we can enjoy the effect as a form of spoken or declamatory opera. Indeed Jane Lapotaire, having before this impersonated Edith Piaf, now takes on Maria Callas - or rather, a Callas-type performance, heroically conceived and dangerously but excitingly exposed (her first entry - she runs on to the stage and into Jaffier's arms - recalls Callas's first entry in the famous Zeffirelli *Tosca*). She goes on to do something I would have thought impossible in our age: she actually brings off her mad scene at the end of the play - a scene so memorably parodied in eighteenth-century burlesques that its serious potential had seemed destroyed for ever. But she quietly takes the audience by surprise and becomes, for a few final moments, touching and even moving. Pennington's Jaffier is another impressive feat of control - intelligently spoken throughout its great length and never monotonous in delivery. Unlike these two bravura performances, Ian McKellen's excellent and unselfish Pierre works through restraint and through tense understatement. His gritty, honest, disillusioned soldier is at all times a valuable counterweight to Jaffier's volatility.

Antonio's scenes with Aquilina are essential to the play's success. Their outrageously "low" prose sets up the entirely necessary contrast to the exalted but deliquescent blank verse of the main action. Hugh Paddick makes the most of Antonio's shamelessness. Stephanie Beacham's Aquilina is a haughty, upper-class, rather debby whore, whose moments of silent exasperation evoke a real person in a disagreeably real situation.

The set by Alison Chitty is handsome but unobtrusive: high gleamy walls and central portal, with the Winged Lion in the tympanum over the doorway - otherwise nothing specifically Venetian, just a big wealthy city seen at night - admirably suiting Otway's subjective, essentially mentalist conception.

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COMMENTARY

Domestic architecture

Graham Swift

MICHAEL FRAYN
Benefactors
Vaudeville Theatre

Michael Frayn's last play was a quintessential farce. Farce can delight in its own theatricality, to its own revealed mechanisms; and the bold, central mechanism of *Neises Off* – that the audience should watch the backstage follies and calamities of a company of actors as they perform, or attempt to perform, a farce – was a hilarious paradigm of the form. Frayn's new play is certainly not a farce. It begins and ends with shadowy expressionism and contains such lines as "it's a dark universe". But it has the ingredients of farce – two couples in and out of each other's homes and lives – and it has a central mechanism, metaphorical this time, by which the play (to borrow from that very metaphor) must stand or fall.

David is an architect, much concerned with the standing or falling of things. His project (we are in the mid-1960s) is to provide high-density accommodation to replace dilapidated housing on a difficult suburban site. As the physical and official restrictions impinge, his original plan for several six-storey blocks turns into one for two fifty-storey towers, unprecedented for their time; and as these meet with opposition and controversy, they become in turn emblems of David's motivation, determination and (collapsing) confidence.

Both David and his wife Jane seem indeed buoyant children of their times. Stripped-pine domestic competence mingles with professional self-assurance. What almost destroys them is less the public repercussions of David's scheme than the intrusion on their lives and illusions of

their neighbours Colin and Sheila. The apparent positiveness of the one couple is matched by the self-destructiveness of the other. Colin ill-treats his wife and thrives on envy and spite, mostly directed, covertly at first, at David. Sheila, teetering on the brink of neurosis, repeatedly unloads herself on David and Jane, to a pitch where they resignedly and pityingly employ her as a secretary-cum-daily help – a mere preamble to her leaving Colin altogether and moving in permanently. Infatuated already with the couple's life-style, she falls in love with David. Colin meanwhile goes off to live in a squat on the still undemolished site of the proposed tower blocks and becomes a vociferous public opponent of the scheme.

The ironic upshot is that though Sheila's dependence and Colin's spite are crystallized, their sense of purpose is, separately, rebuilt; simultaneously David and Jane totter on the shifting ground of divided loyalties, betrayals and domestic disillusionment. The tower block scheme is eventually dropped in favour of refurbishing the old houses, and the play (which by implication spans several years) ends uneasily with 1960s audacity and desire for change giving way to more recent conservatism.

The central idea is apparent, even in this brief summary. Identities, purposes, relationships, no less than housing schemes, can be "constructions", often built on foundations other than those they are thought to have. David and Jane are complacently conscious of how they have "redeveloped" Colin and Sheila, but are less aware of how their own confidence has rested on a sense of superiority to Colin and Sheila's apparent hopelessness. It is Colin, most knowing and least attractive of the characters, who sees this latter irony and exploits it ruthlessly, upsetting the psyche-

logical base David and Jane require and inducing a state in which they will "pull each other down".

The abiding metaphor is sometimes illuminating, but everworked. Passages occur indeed in which the point of the play seems little more than to draw parallels between architecture and human relationships or where characters seize with improbable energy on the psychological implications of such phrases as "rehabilitation", "defective materials" or "progressive collapse". Frayn has a very fertile wit, but there are times when *Benefactors* plays with rather than explores its own ideas.

Likewise, the mobile and resourceful stagecraft, so evident in *Neises Off*, works somewhat equivocally in the new play. Frayn repeatedly freezes the action, allowing characters to step out of it to offer confidential or ironical comment, so that we are, as it were, constantly shifting between an onstage and a backstage view of things, in the manner of *Neises Off*. It is dextrously done, but it concentrates attention on the dramatic foreground, on a theatrical wit matching the verbal one, to the detriment of the searching, reflective vein the play is clearly meant to have. The gestures towards moral speculation – Colin's talk of "light" and "dark" – are clumsy; the characters never quite "live" beyond the special preoccupations of the play; and the whole public aspect of David's scheme receives in fact very sketchy treatment. On the one hand the scheme seems only there to provide a dramatic matrix for the protagonists; on the other it is

hard to credit that one man's professional endeavours could provide such a sustained focus for four lives.

Despite these problems, the cast and Michael Blakemore's direction offer a splendid course between easy satire – David and Jane as mere 1960s trendies – and, despite one reference to *The Master Builder*, the Ibsenian. Oliver Cotten's David, if somewhat too gushing, convinces by a palpable innocence inside what could be the welf's role. He does not hate the man who hates him; will not believe violence when he sees it; is not even consumed by professional ambition, accepting generously when his scheme is opposed that "it's a free country".

The outstanding performance, though, is Brenda Blethyn's Sheila. A quivery mixture of vulnerability, muddle and opportunism, she yet rises to curiously uncentrally moments of steadiness and lucidity. Cocooned inside another couple's life, she finds herself, almost inadvertently, affirming that the reason for the world's perplexity and inertia is that people do not know what they want – they want to be told what they want. Thus in one breath she not only analyses her own predicament – in attaching herself to David and Jane she has been given her involuntary desire – but diagnoses the malaise of domestic architecture. It is a moment when the play's thematic and psychological concerns come persuasively together, and when an intellectual point is resonantly made with the voice of feeling rather than the voice of wit.

Sexually scenic

Malcolm Bowie

Swann in Love
Lumière Cinema

What is happening inside Mme Verdurin's mouth? Amid the excited noises of a dinner party, this once-volatile orifice has been silenced: the Verdunin jaw has been locked open by some social exertion of her facial muscles. But as she waits for the power of speech to be restored to her, this dry-weather gargoyle still presides over her assembled "little clan". For although nothing, far from it, is happening inside her month, her pinc-stricken gaze gives her a new kind of authority over her followers and keeps them gazing in thrall as surely as her wheedling and her blandishments had a moment earlier. Volker Schlöndorff has a practised eye for the ludicrous *salon* incident and punctuates with grotesque and altogether Proustian images such as this a film which is often otherwise a gleaming, mellifluous procession of period effects.

But the corner in which Mme Verdurin and her friends find themselves – where there is nothing to do but exchange incredulous stares – resembles the corner towards which Schlöndorff pushes his audience. For despite the many verbal jokes and niceties of the Brook/Carrière screenplay and the acoustic audacity of Hans-Werner Henze's score – which conflates the styles of the present *fin-de-siècle* and the last – this is overwhelmingly a film to be gaped at. Even when the film stops striving for its sensuous allurements and ushers us back from safety to an ordinary this or that going on, the spectator's visual curiosity is still constantly being manipulated: so these were their hats, the images invite us to remark, as the camera passes over dense affrontations of headgear; so these were their brothers, suit and salubrious, as it pursues Swann on his anguished quest for the "real Odette". Proust is, of course, among many things, a superb historian of fashions and of manners. But Schlöndorff seems, to judge by the first visual impact of the film at least, to have given those lesser skills a bizarre prominence in his recreation of *Un Amour de Swann*.

Discussion over the years of the projected Proust film had taught us what not to expect of any film that actually reached the screen – introspection, intellectual acuity, fine writing, metaphor, fantasy. Schlöndorff, in contriving his unashamedly scenic film, has well understood what cannot be captured or

drawn instead upon one of the neglected strengths of *Un Amour de Swann*: its exciting and ingenious plot. That plot has been pinned down to occupy a mere twenty-four hours in the life of the enamoured and rapidly disenchanted Swann, brief flashbacks and an epilogue skotching his complex presence in *A la recherche* at large. But it is by way of the plot that the mind of Swann, so elegantly veiled by Jeremy Irons' performance, begins to emerge. Schlöndorff's one attempt to enter the world of mental process by force fails completely: when Swann is first seen exposed to the imperious charm of Vinteuil's "little phrase", he is positively convulsed as the music plays, and only minutes after Mme de Cambromer's partridge-bedecked hat, wagging by time to the music, has provided us with a perfect emblem for a moment of rapture. Elsewhere the minds of director and character are much finer. The central mental events which sustain Proust's plot are Swann's changing perceptions of Odette and his efforts to solve the enigmas which surrounded her sexuality, her disreputable past and her seeming intellect. In Proust, Swann's passion for knowledge often takes lowly pantomimic forms – eavesdropping, quizzing, snooping, searching in cupboards – and Schlöndorff has been able to construct from these a powerful sense of intellectual drama. Swann's postulates and counter-postulates about Odette, his theories and his proofs, are made visible in his crazed and contradictory actions. In its account of Swann himself the film uses the opulence and fluency of its photographic surfaces to give a striking impression of psychological depth.

It is in the person of Odette that a third problem arises and that the film threatens. All Ornella Muti's prettiness, to become a plain thing. Muti creates "insupportable" Odette by way of an insistent fresh-faced candour. Yes, this Odette is a mobile forest of Swann's fantasies; and yes, she is a sexual polymorph of an authentic Proustian kind. But the camera lingers so fondly upon her pale breasts, eyes and teeth that Proust's anxious criticism of the half-said and the half-seen is swamped and simplified. This is so much the sort of risk that the director willingly takes throughout that he should perhaps be congratulated on succeeding in this area only. Besides, this is not the first brilliant film to have been intruded upon by the female. *Odette*, *Vogue* and *Playboy*. It is good to have a Proust film in existence at last, and this film alone – with its consistently

The joys of bigotry

Noel Annan

A.N. WILSON
Hilare Belloc
386pp. Hamish Hamilton. £12.95.
0241 111765

Ne are among the generation of our fathers and grandfathers can excite in enlightened liberals such a pleasurable glew of self-righteous indignation as Hilare Belloc: a notorious and impetuous antisemite; the most militant of all Catholics in an age of intense proselytizing, an ultramontanist who despised Jews as a milkop but worshipped him as God because the Church told him to do so; a self-styled Republican who preferred the company of aristocrats, a radical in politics who turned against Lloyd George's radical measures because he put before his political principles his hatred of the man as an adulterer and a trickster; on admirer of Napoleon and Mussolini who, he persuaded himself, favoured the common man despite the enmities against the poor which their military ambition led them to commit; a controversialist who did not even pretend to have a regard for common accuracy, let alone truth, a shameless plagiarist of his own books (in 1928 and 1929 he wrote twelve and by the end his publications numbered 150) – books which he dictated, leaving the editing of the text and the correction of the proofs to his secretary: a journalist who took jobs as an editor without the faintest intention of appearing in the office and who then fell into a fury when his employers did not recognize that they owed him a living; a fabulous talker and prodigious drinker, a satirist and wit yet with strong claims to go in second wicket down for England as a bare forever repeating the same tales, a man whose ideas were formed by the time he was twenty and who never changed them, who laid down the law on any subject that took his fancy, military affairs being a favourite on which his prognostications were usually wrong; a husband so chaste that he was at a loss for some months how to consummate his marriage satisfactorily, worshipping his wife and yet so indifferent to her feelings that he rarely stayed with her longer than a couple of months before he was off on another tour abroad on his own, a husband who would never come home to dine with her if he could find the company of either roisters; an absentee father who saw his children for the most part flee his company when they grew up, having known very little of it in their childhood except in the form of his imperious temper; a man of filthy habits, his clothes covered with soup, candle-grease and dandruff, the coat pockets stuffed with a bottle of white port, bread and fishbones; a poet whose light verse alone is read today and whose best-known rhythmic feat, "Do you remember an inn, Miranda?", which inspired a generation of unmarried Fabian rambles to wander over Europe revelling in the joys of the simple life, now turns out to be addressed, not to a woman (for that would have been to condone fornication), but to echo the family name of the Duke of Miranda who happened once to be the Spanish ambassador in London.

And yet Belloc was admired by many in the generation before the First World War and revered by many after it. A. N. Wilson's triumph is an outstanding biography is to make this credible. This clever, dry, amusing novelist confounds criticism of Belloc by the frankness with which he draws attention to Belloc's intolerable failings and the shrewdness by which he makes them intelligible. His apology is a demonstration of the force, the sheer size of this ego, the coolness, the vigour, the irrepressible vitality of this man who was "more riotously, more intolerably himself than almost any other human being".

Belloc's hatreds were legion, his devotion to his friends legendary. Who were they? They began with his upper-class Balliol friends such as Basil Blackwood, who introduced him to the world of the Souls and their children. George Wyndham led his admirers, Lady Juliet Duff adored him and he, Lady Diana Duff Cooper revelled in his company. Next were the Catholic converts, Maurice Baring, Katharine Asquith, the Herberts and the Chestertons, and then the journalists, the descendants of Penguins and bright broken

Maginn, such as Beauchamp, Hesketh Pearson and Hugh Kingsmill. He was a man whom people would sooner spend an evening with than anyone else. His ebullience, sense of mischief and recklessness kept them laughing. When he cursed his friends they fell about. At his sixtieth birthday all forty guests made a speech. He was not as some claimed a genius; but he had a genius for company.

Like most of these who drink and talk late into the night so long as they can get someone to listen, he was lonely. He was also poor, because his mother had lost the family fortune and he never forgave the world for the disaster.



Belloc and Basil Blackwood at Oxford.

All his life he scraped to satisfy his wants, and what he wanted he must have. The first thing he wanted was the girl who was to become his wife, an Irish American girl visiting London. Belloc was only twenty when he threw up everything to cross to the Pacific coast. He earned his living as he went, often on foot, to where she lived in the Napa Valley. He returned thwarted by the girl's mother and her own notion that she might have a vocation as a nun. Born in France of a French father he was liable for military service there and he served in the artillery instead of shooting lions in Africa. Six years later he married his love. When she died in 1914, he shut up her bedroom, kissing the door or making the sign of the cross when he passed it, for the next forty years. He venerated her memory in such a solemn way, Mr Wilson suggests, that he wanted to conceal from himself that his marriage had its ups and downs like everyone else's. In his case it was married by poverty, anxiety and bad temper.

His second grudge was against Oxford. Somehow the French artilleryman got to Balliol. He was considerably older than his contemporaries and swept all before him, President of the Union, a first in history – until he tried for All Souls. At dinner there after the exam he talked without a pause on French military manoeuvres, confident that the Fellows would be astounded by his brilliance. Belloc was not elected. Dons were added to his list of hatreds. For all his range of knowledge he was never on intellectual and did not share in controversy with dons.

Also on the list of hatreds, though in a more cosmic way, were infidels and heretics. Writing with excellent knowledge of the faith, Mr Wilson is at his best when analysing Belloc's Catholicism, which was the antithesis of what the Church teaches today. Belloc took his text from Manning (who sowed the seed of his mother's conversion): "all human conflict is ultimately theological". It suited his natural belligerence. To bring home to his countrymen that history had no meaning other than the ebb and flow of the tide of Catholicism and that the Church alone preserved civilization was Belloc's mission in life. "Four powers," he wrote, "govern men; avarice, lust, fear and snobishness. One cannot use the first three" – but one could use the fourth. So he declared that membership of the Church was the equivalent of being born into the best families or joining the

right regiment or the right club. To compare the Roman Church to the Anglican Church was like comparing the Carlton Club to the club of Hercules. The word was the same but the meaning completely different. Nothing pleased him more than to shock the devout. When his son-in-law was being received into the Church he asked the officiating priest in a loud voice whether there was a telephone in the sacristy. Neither mysticism nor dogma nor ritual meant much to him. He was not a spiritual man. What mattered was Will, its subjection to the Church and its imposition upon heretics. He gloried in being a bigot.

From this fellowed his vision of history according to which power in England had been usurped by an aristocratic oligarchy that had plundered the Church. The House of Commons was a swindle in that ministers were personally corrupt and the division between the parties, like British democracy itself, was fake. The true rulers were Jewish financiers and faceless bankers. The only government which cared for the people was a Catholic monarchy; on the other hand Dante was right to overthrow such a monarchy and the Revolution and the Terror also were to be welcomed. Mr Wilson acknowledges that Belloc's history, always inaccurate, was mostly rubbish and rhetoric. But he knew that history extends our memory and through it we commune with our ancestors. For years he had a receptive audience in clever public schoolboys sharpening their wits for Oxbridge scholarships. To be anti-capitalist yet not dingily socialist, to praise monarchy, the baroque, the wicked Mediterranean, to dethrone all the heroes of earnest, middle-brow, decent, liberal-conservative schoolmasters, to outrage and never ask what would be the effect of the outrage, was Belloc's legacy to the young.

At one point, however, Mr Wilson's remarkable candour fails him. He knows, of course, that the holocaust has made antisemitism, for at least a generation, as he puts it, the unforgivable sin. So he boldly sets out to give Belloc conditional absolution. Was not, he asks, Belloc's book *The Jews* at least honest in arguing that Jewish secrecy (which bred antisemitic fantasies of plots for world domination), and the Jewish cult of being a chosen and superior race, were bound to cause resentment and make assimilation an impossibility? After all he never attacked East End Jews, only the Rothschilds, Sassoons and their likes. Was he not courageous to "recognise Jews as Jews" and not pretend that the "problem" did not exist?

But what is this "solution" but a statement of English practice to the first half of this century? Maugham's story, "The Alien Corn" is good enough evidence. Recognizing Jews as Jews with varying degrees of distaste was endemic among society, including members of the intelligentsia such as Keynes. Many public schools operated quotas to limit the entry of Jews, numbers of West End clubs excluded them whether or not they were Christians or for that matter members of the MCC. But Britain was also renowned among Jews as

being the least antisemitic European country, a civilized, tolerant, humane society which honored tradition – and among those the traditions of an age-old race and religion from which Protestants derived their own beliefs; a country where a Jew had become Prime Minister and had led the party of the landowning gentry; a country whose King had chosen Jews as his companions; a country which was contemptuous of any ideology, especially that of race.

That was what Belloc resented. He was a Catholic ideologist, an anti-Dreyfussard translated to England. He leathed British tolerance; he wanted more schools, more clubs, more institutions to bar, humiliate, snub, injure and insult Jews. America was much better at this in his view. Mr Wilson thinks that Gentiles are unwilling to accept the fact which Jews themselves acknowledge, namely that they are a separate group within society. This is not so. All honest people accept that there are differences between groups, whether they arise from race, religion, not less, class or status. Indeed the recognition of these differences is a source of wonder, interest and amusement. Think how much harmless merriment would be lost if we did not accept such differences. But in a pluralist society civilized people consider it degrading if the existence of these differences is exploited to ignite prejudice and hatred. Belloc fanned them.

What did he mean by his lines on the Jews putting Jesus to death? But on the third day, as the Gospel shows, "Cheating their machinations. He arose." In Whose commemoration new and then, "In Whose persecute these curly-headed men"? Wilson adds "Either you find this funny or you don't." It is not a question of finding it funny. Nor is it a question of the holocaust disturbing our historical judgment. What Belloc meant was that there ought to be more persecution of the Jews, not less. What is the difference between Belloc bawling abuse against the Yids at dinner parties and Mosley's blackshirts marching to the chant of "The Yids, the Yids, we've got to get rid of the Yids"? Both wanted to create resentment and misery for the Jews in England. To the credit of Englishmen of their time they both failed. The world would be a duller place without malice but Belloc could never distinguish between malice and venom.

In the end Mr Wilson wonders whether Belloc's greatness consisted not in what he said but in what he was; and he brings Belloc back to life. Yet in the park of English letters Belloc built himself a monument which still stands. It is a small folly whose northern façade is composed of those satirical, scathing lines in which he mocked smart society. Mr Wilson quotes the "Ballade of Hell & Mrs Roebuck" though not, alas, "Mrs James Will Entertain the King". The south front overlooks a playground for children. Verse heard in childhood is never forgotten; and so long as verse is still read aloud to children the *Cautionary Tales*, the *Books of Beasts* and the rhythms of Miranda's inn will be imprinted on the minds of a new generation.

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ANN THWAITE
Edmund Gosse: A literary landscape 1849-1928
567pp. Secker and Warburg. £15.
0436521466

Long before he died in 1928 at the age of seventy-nine, Edmund Gosse was recognized as a sort of literary elder statesman. Awarded the CB in 1912 and knighted in 1925, he presided over book functions, mingled with politicians and aristocrats and even dined with royalty. In the 1920s his pulpit was the *Sunday Times*, where he delivered a weekly *causerie*, setting the pattern later followed by Raymond Mortimer and Cyril Connolly. But Gosse, wholly out of sympathy with the younger generation, was already attracting sneers. To Virginia Woolf and to Evelyn Waugh he was an eminent Victorian fraud whose achievements were more those of a socialite than a writer, and this has perhaps been the prevailing view of him - in so far as there has been a view at all - in the interim years.

Although *Father and Son* (1907) is now his only well-known book, Gosse left behind a small mountain of poetry, biography and *belles-lettres*. A century ago his various writings, together with his contacts, made up for the academic credentials he lacked, helping him to escape from a menial job in the British Museum and ultimately to secure the librarianship of the House of Lords. He became the bookman-in-residence of the British upper class.

Gosse's career, or careerism, has awaited thorough investigation. Evan Charteris's official *Life and Letters*, published in 1931, though not a bad or uncandid book, hardly exhausted the subject, and in the *Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, which has a vivid sketch of Gosse, John Gross suggested that a fresh appraisal was due. Responding to this suggestion, Ann Thwaite embarked on nine years' research. The resultant tome is tantamount to a Gosse encyclopaedia and, if only as a detailed chronicle of Gosse's life, is unlikely to be bettered.

Mrs Thwaite has discovered that Gosse exaggerated the claustrophobia of his Islington childhood though the account of his early years as given in *Father and Son* appears to be essentially true. His father Philip, the naturalist and Plymouth Brother, emerges no less as an enemy of every form of indulgence. Gosse described how his father once seized the Christmas pudding to which the servants were furiously treating Edmund, and themselves and threw it out. The son's companionability no doubt grew out of such privations, just as his enthusiasm for literature came from his father's efforts to deny him access to all narrative books except the Bible. Thwaite notes that on its anonymous publication in 1907, *Father and Son* caused a minor sensation, but while it is an acknowledged minor classic and nowadays features on school syllabuses, the book inevitably reads more flatly than it did at a time when filial piety was still *de rigueur*.

Thwaite gives a full account of Gosse's time as a young man in London in the 1870s. He became an apprentice aesthete (pointedly informing his father about the hell-raising company he was keeping), had early poetic ambitions, thinking of himself as a possible successor to Swinburne, and made a cult of male friendship. Though he married happily and fathered children, one of whom, Sylvia, painted outstandingly, he had, as Thwaite now reveals, a grand passion for the sculptor Hamo Thornycroft. She points out that Gosse was a principled libertarian, but this libertarianism was not proclaimed, and at the time of Wilde's trial Gosse politely requested Robbie Ross, a mutual friend, to keep away. Gosse is hardly to be blamed for this, but the incident illuminates the limits of his unconventionality.

Respectability seems indeed to have been inseparable from Gosse's literary progress. Thwaite rightly sees his appointment as Clark Lecturer at Cambridge in 1884 as the central episode in his career, but she surely underestimates the part played by Gosse's good standing in the literary world from being courted by the scandal-mongers produced in the *Quarterly Review*.

Shakespeare to Pope, the published version of the lectures, as a repository of howlers. Collins, more of an academic than Gosse, but teaching long hours in a crammer, may have resented Gosse's apparently easy success; but the trouble was that nearly all his criticisms were bull's-eyes. Gosse had got dates wildly wrong, muddled up prose and poetry, and generally written like a rampant dilettante. The press exploited his discomfiture for all it was worth, and for a while it looked as though to "make a Gosse of yourself" might become a catch-phrase. However, friends rallied to his support, assuring him that the attack could only discredit the attacker. "I do not know much about eighteenth-century literature," wrote Rider Haggard representatively, "but I do know what conduct a gentleman has a right to expect from another." Gosse's facts may have been wrong, but his manners were correct, and in the end it was Collins rather than

Gosse who earned the contempt of Society.

Thwaite maintains that Gosse's critical writings are still worth reading. Yet to highlight the Gosse-Collins imbroglio, and to confirm in the process that Collins had the right of the argument, scarcely seems the best challenge to the view that they were, at best, graceful ephemerata and, at worst, twaddle. It is well to be reminded that Gosse translated Ibsen and assisted in the revival of Donne. But the very titles of his collections, *Critical Kit-Kats* (1896) and *Byways round Helicon* (1922), are eloquent of their leisurely, impressionistic contents. Gosse remarked that when he first read *The Tempest* his soul filled with music and romance; he was an avowed amateur indifferent to, perhaps incapable of, painstaking criticism, and only too ready to see the object as it really is not. In *Father and Son* he is at his best, perhaps because the picture presented there cannot be damaged by the discovery that he did

not get the facts quite right. It is the one book by Gosse where the "genius for inaccuracy" Henry Janics ascribed to him may have been to his credit.

Thwaite writes about Gosse sympathetically, even indulgently. He is presented as an essentially sweet man whose fulsomeness - "The Lord bless you . . . The Lord make his face to shine upon you" he once wrote to Lord Haldane - derived simply from wanting to be liked. Not that he was not likeable: his whole career advertises his engagingness. But as a biographical subject, Gosse might have gained from more dispassionate treatment. He might have benefited too from less exhaustive coverage. Himself a short-winded writer, Gosse objected to the sort of biography that is a "pabulum of facts". Seeming to pause over Gosse's every move and not even skipping on information about his cats, Ann Thwaite comes close to provoking just this objection.

Monumentally progressive

J. Enoch Powell

FRANCIS WEST
Gilbert Murray: A life
265pp. Croom Helm. £17.95.
0709927924

I am rather sorry upon the whole to have read this biography of Gilbert Murray. It did not leave undamaged the kindly memories of him that I retained. Admittedly, I encountered him only in his last decades, after 1936 when he had ceased at the age of seventy to be Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford. I remembered his horror at discovering, after he had voted against me for the Readership in Classics at Queen Mary College, that my fellowship at Trinity, Cambridge, was terminable, and how he made amends by supporting my candidature for the Professorship of Greek at Sydney. I remembered, too, the day in 1937 when, as I drove up to Boar's Hill in his open car, I said to him "We have got to go to war with Germany", and he looked me in the face with his sky-clear blue eyes and replied, "I think so too." I remembered the tolerant kindness of the ageing couple at Yatscombe, and the professor's

ainly devotion to a wife whose mind had given way. And all this, though our prejudices and our Greek scholarship were poles apart.

Biography draws the curtain to reveal what age softened or obliterated: the awful priggishness, the barren agnosticism, the irrationally optimistic humanism, the more than Victorian valetudinarianism and hypochondria.

Murray was born in Australia of an Irish Roman Catholic father and a Welsh Protestant mother, but he was educated and lived in England from the age of eleven. His command and memory of Greek literature as an undergraduate at Oxford were evidently phenomenal. The precocity of his appointment at twenty-three to the Chair of Greek at Glasgow beat that of Friedrich Nietzsche at Basle by one year and myself at Sydney by two. At the time of his move from Oxford to Glasgow he collected as his wife Lady Mary Howard, daughter of the wealthy and Whiggish Earl of Carlisle, and incidentally acquired as his devoted patron the formidable Countess.

The young couple must have been a preposterous pair. His bride wrote to him, "Our love is not for ourselves alone but for humanity"; it would unite their souls, she said, "till we can

lay them without fear at the feet of the Unknown God and let them die together in service of humanity". Murray could never forget that he was dedicated to the cause of "civilization" and "progress" ("If anyone comes into my house who doesn't believe in progress", said Lady Carlisle, "out he goes.") That was the excuse and justification for studying Greek and interpreting it to others. After ten years at Glasgow, Murray, with his wife's able assistance, had fussed and fretted himself and his children into invalidism. He threw up his Chair to become - on Carlisle money - a country gentleman in Surrey and follow his star as a poetic and dramatic interpreter of the most "civilized" and "progressive", humanistic and agnostic, of the Greek tragedians, Euripides; "there are many learned Greek professors", he announced, "there are few poets".

For another nine years he was a devotee of the amateur and professional stage and a familiar of the principal actors and playwrights of the day, turning out a stream of astonishingly successful poetic renderings of Euripidean plays. On the side he flirted with Liberal politics, through the years of that Party's eclipse. I would not mind an Irish seat, if I could sit at an extreme radical, but I would be worried to death as an English Liberal. Indeed, "he did he could stand the strain neither of a contest election nor of a parliamentary life". In the end Murray got bored with being a poet and accordingly landed the Regius Chair of Greek at Oxford: "It will be a great satisfaction to be doing some honest work again after so long languishing as a superfluous minor poet".

That was in 1908. Meanwhile Murray had been seized with the evolutionary theory of Greek civilization, religion and tragedy, and influenced by German discoveries of the evolution of the Pentateuch. But the First World War - Murray was "not a pacifist" - was the great revolution in his life. It turned the optimistic humanism into the acid channel of the League of Nations Union, which he served conscientiously and administratively from 1917 to 1939, taking also a lead at Geneva of the Committee of Intellectual Co-operation, the forerunner of UNESCO. The war put him in the grained utopianism under critical strain. "The League", he once said, "has ruined the Greek." What in fact it had done was to replace the optimism of Euripides with the pessimism of Aeschylus, of which Murray produced a disastrously bad critical text in 1917 and the self-mockery of Aristophanes. I was sad but wiser Gilbert Murray who watched the Second World War add the socializing of post-war Britain, to die at ninety-one in 1937. *Pax cineris*: I would like to think that he meant to receive the last offices from a Roman Catholic priest.

Francis West, the Professor of History at Geelong, has done a hard-working job of someone whom his own daughter called "my dear Monty". Murray himself hated pedantry; but *gêlère* in *en cette galère* does mean "gallery", "obscure" certainly is not derived from *ob scena* ("bad theatre"). Euripidean swine were not in a "parable".

Appealing to the community

Jeremy Waldron

RONALD BEINER
Political Judgment
199pp. Methuen. £11.95 (paperback, £5.95).
0416342701

That the Falkland Islands were worth fighting for was an opinion held by many people in this country and acted on by their political leaders. Expressed across breakfast tables and debated earnestly in lounge bars, it was a judgment of the sort that no citizen had any doubt about his ability to form or his right to maintain. Yet according to the conventional wisdom of political science, such an opinion is simply an aggregation of judgments of two different types. It involves value-judgments about the ends or principles of political action (the importance of our sovereignty, for example, or the wrongness of aggression) and it involves a host of technical judgments about the feasibility of pursuing those values in the real world (judgments about economics, logistics, military strategy, etc.). Judgments of the first sort are supposed to be beyond rational argument: either one is committed to the values or one is not. Judgments of the second sort are the proper domain of the technician: if you want to know if we can bomb Port Stanley from a British airfield, you ask an expert in military aviation, not the man standing next to you in the bar. What then were we doing *arguing* about the Falklands?

The point of Ronald Beiner's book is to challenge that conventional approach to political judgment. Beiner sets out to explore the basis of a political philosophy which takes seriously the integrity of our judgments and the competence of ordinary men and women to make them. He seeks an alternative theory of judgment with which to replace the technocratic view, and is interested in pursuing the ideas

of community and commonsense in politics that such a theory would presuppose.

Much of the book is concerned with the philosophical roots of a theory of judgment. Its main contribution (and the reason why it ought to be read) is that it assembles material from Aristotle's discussions of rhetoric and practical reason and from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and outlines clearly and precisely the contrasting ways in which this material has been digested by those modern writers whose approach to politics Beiner sees as most consonant with his own - Hannah Arendt (he edited her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*), Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas. These contrasts are sharp and important. The relevant sections of Kant's third critique are oriented primarily towards aesthetics. In their account of our capacity to make judgments about the beauty and quality of art, they offer at most an analogy with the form of political judgment and with the formal relations that must exist between the judging individual and the community whose commonsense he is implicitly addressing. For the substance and content of political judgment and for the ways human judges appeal to the sympathies of their fellows, we must look to Aristotle.

In the modern reception of these ideas, then, we are given a contrast between Gadamer, who believes that Kant has stranded the topic of judgment in an aesthetic *cul-de-sac* from which nothing but a recovery of Aristotelian humanism could rescue it, and Arendt, who believed that Kant's reflections on aesthetic judgment held the key to his social and political philosophy. Because of the learning and lucidity of this exposition, *Political Judgment* must now be taken as the indispensable starting-point for any further exploration of these topics.

But it must be said that Beiner himself has

not offered anything approaching a satisfactory theory of judgment. There is an unhappy contrast between the scholarly vigour of this exposition of the work of others in the central chapters of the book and the rather limp attempt to formulate insights of his own in the final fifty pages. There is space here to indicate only a couple of the gaps and tensions that disfigure Beiner's discussion.

First, having repudiated the conventional technocratic view of judgment in the opening pages, Beiner goes on to write as though that view had never existed. But it has strengths which cannot be so easily ignored. Political controversies exist; people make judgments in politics, as in morals, which differ profoundly and irreconcilably from one another. The conventional view can account for these disagreements: people base their judgments on different commitments and different information. But Beiner is embarrassed by controversy: it ruptures the *sensus communis* which judgment presupposes on his account; it undermines the idea that we share a faculty of judgment in common; and it certainly cannot be accommodated by repeating as a mantra the Wittgensteinian idea that there is bound to be *something* in common even between the most hostile antagonists. Further, the conventional view offers a better account of the way judgments respond to criticism. New information leads people to change their judgments in some ways; conversion to new commitments leads to other sorts of change. The conventional view, with its articulated model, can explain this. To Beiner, with his insistence on the sacred integrity of ordinary judgment, it remains a mystery. These points are perhaps not conclusive in favour of the conventional view, but they indicate the incompleteness of Beiner's argument.

Second, Beiner seems determined to proceed on the assumption that if anyone is competent to make political judgments then every-

one is. Like Kant, he describes that competence as a faculty of the mind, rather than as a skill to be acquired. This is a mistake. Leaving aside heuristic objections to the invocation of faculties (one is tempted to ask, with Nietzsche, whether an explanation in these terms is not "merely a repetition of the question"), the move leads Beiner into terrible contradictions about the extent to which judgment is actually exercised in communities like ours. If the mind has a faculty for judgment, then judgment, like eyesight, will be common and natural, and failures of judgment exceptional; even pathological. Such a failure is found, Beiner tells us, in the case (discussed by Arendt) of Adolf Eichmann, the administrator of Nazi genocide: "Adolf Eichmann lacks the faculty of judging; you and I do not lack it, we possess and exercise it regularly". But Beiner knows this will not do, and elsewhere describes Eichmann as "the paradigmatic figure of the unthinking and unjudging citizen of our times". That is closer to Arendt's estimation - she spoke, after all, of the banality of Eichmann's case. Even so, other dimensions of her account are missing. Judgment, in Beiner's presentation, is the function of a spectator; yet it is Arendt's point that what the Eichmanns of this world forsook was the capacity for action, in the fullest sense. They could remain spectators of the crimes they were perpetrating precisely because the connection between judgment and participation had been smashed.

That men like Eichmann failed to exercise political judgment (or, indeed, the most basic forms of moral concern) shows how much such a "faculty" depends on practice and on the social conditions in which it is exercised. Judgment is a social artifact and a very fragile one. I do not see how a work which neglects the point (as this work does) can hope to say anything important about the events of our times, let alone offer the basis of a new political philosophy.

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Tony Tanner

THOMAS DOCHERTY
Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a theory of characterization in fiction
288pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £22.50.
0198128223

Once upon a time there were people called authors who wrote novels which contained characters. These books were read by people called readers who in varying ways identified with the plights and pleasures of some characters and dreaded or loathed or laughed at others. This has all been changed—at least for a small but influential number of critics and no doubt for many of their students. Thomas Docherty's book is a good example of the possible extremities of the changes in attitude towards author, reader and character. The rather irritatingly aynthetic title of his book is characteristic of a desire and intention to deviate from and undermine what he takes to be the mindless conventional attitudes towards readers and (absent) characters. His thesis and general attack on "humanistic" notions of self and character are hardly new. What distinguishes his book—if that is the right word—is an extraordinary range of reference. I could fill this review simply by listing all the novelists and critics—English, American and French mainly—whom he quotes or to whom he refers, though his main focus of interest is on the *nouveau roman* and all those so-called (and self-styled) post-modern writers whose work he takes uncommonly seriously (one would hardly know if he thought Proust a greater writer than, say, Ronald Sukenick).

His thesis, generally speaking, is that much modern fiction denies the reader a unified perspective, instead keeping him in "a fragmented subjective relation to the text". He points often to an increasing degree of "anonymity" in characterization and argues that "just as the continuous identity of characters may be disrupted, so may that of the reader, as he or she become merely a series of now anonymous 'I's". Thus "the radical break comes in fiction when we see the psyche of the reader, a real human, being probed through a more radical involvement of his or her position and perspective in the creation of the fictional text, and also in the very creation of subjectivity". (Rather refreshing to see a reference to "a real human"—one gets the sense in this book that such an old-fashioned concept will no longer hold.) Starting with an analysis of an

extract from *Dombey and Son* Docherty moves to Robbe-Grillet where "the only persons involved in the articulation of a text are those who 'speak' it, the writer and reader". "Character", presumably, has gone (absent); or characters have become "word-masses". In fact what really "speaks" in many fictions of this century is simply "the text itself". Of course. (I may say at this point that despite many perceptive readings of dozens of novels there is not, so far as I can see, very much that is new in Docherty's overall thesis—little that couldn't be found, for example, in Stephen Heath's *The Nouveau Roman*.)

The argument of the first chapter ("From Description to Position") is that in contrast to "the classical Realist text" (that somewhat elusive phenomenon) modern works give the reader "a mobility of position and subjectivity". The repeated emphasis is on "the position which the text has made the reader occupy". This is followed by a long chapter on "Names" which is an often interesting and illuminating examination of what exactly is "the importance of the proper name in characterization" and, following that, an inquiry into the significance of "the suppression of proper names and the concomitant growth of anonymity and pronominal presences in fiction" with related questions as to "what will be the source of authority behind the speech acts (texts) which accrue about these impersonal selves". There is a lot about the difference between "essentialist" and "existentialist" nomination which I will not attempt to summarize (though I think it leads to some assertions which border on absurdity—eg, "the fixity of the name endangers the supposititious freedom to change in the character", as if, before the discontinuous anonymous non-character of post-modernism, no character in literature with a fixed name ever had the "freedom" to change! Indeed one thing missing from Docherty's book is any real inquiry into the very notion of "character". It is not an invention of the Protestant bourgeois novel as he sometimes seems to imply. Are there not characters in Homer? Shakespeare? Cervantes? And have they not been changing in various ways since literature as we know it began? Docherty writes much about a necessary "decentralization of the self" (well, well), since, following Leo Bersani, he sees "the release from the sease of a centred self as being the only real freedom, for character and reader alike". I wonder.

There follows a chapter on "The Voice of Authority". I didn't expect to read much more

about the death or "supposititious removal" of the old author—but here it is again, with the inevitable corollary that nowadays "certain texts may operate to grant their reader the position of an authoritative speaking subject". Which is as much as to say that many recent (and not so recent) fictions do not permit the reader to rest in the position of a passive consumer but allow—or force—the reader to be active, on the move and constantly working and thus participating in the creation of the novel and, arguably, in the recreation of himself or herself. Which is true enough but hardly news.

The second section of the book deals with time and plot, ends and beginnings, and Docherty quotes everyone from Kant to Frank Kermode, from Lessing to Lacan, in a rather dizzy or dizzying way. Again there are many acute local observations on innumerable novels, but again the basic ideas are repeated ("post-Modernism often dispenses entirely with the continuity of the discrete individual") and so are some rather old ones ("recent fiction has us 'enter the frame'"). The conclusion is that "the historical arrangement of 'and then . . . and then' narrated with a past-oriented sense of time is overwhelmed in some post-Modern fiction with its future-oriented temporal arrangement of 'and now . . . and now again'". It seems a rather small return for what is obviously a formidable amount of reading. Perhaps more fairly I should say that the journey is more interesting than the destination. A third section entitled "From Motivation to Mobility" seems to me to add little to the overall argument, although again the rapidity with which Docherty can jump from one writer to another is—well—remarkable (eg, Milton leads directly to Kafka). A fourth section finds us somewhat surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly in view of Docherty's enthusiastic eclecticism—in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century France. The point is to compare Descartes and his notion of "the monologue of [a] supreme individual"; Montaigne and his interest in "the process of producing that final product, the self"; and Pascal who, because of the uncertain and open ordering of his *Pensées*, becomes a kind of honorary post-Modernist (he is compared to William Burroughs) because "we are thus involved, as in post-Modern fiction, in a process of creating multiple senses from fragments . . .". About such a contention I feel helpless to say anything. But it does lead Docherty to an assertion which explains his rather curious last section. Thus: "Descartes' Protestant voice of democracy, asserting the

power of the individual and his or her autonomy, becomes, in the hands of Pascal, the democracy of voices, asserting the value of catholic or universal community."

That last word explains the emphasis of the concluding pages—if not much of the underlying feeling of the book. Docherty turns to Catholicism and Judaism, which in different ways would seem to offer forms of community (communions) which can entail "a loss of the individual self". That "individual self" is in a way the culprit in the book—and it is a Protestant self. Thus the concluding conclusion: "The Protestant Reclot model for fiction poses a anterior original and unified source of meaning and that meaning is the meaning of the individual. The alternative to this, as seen in more catholic approach and in the Jewish mosaic model, posits a future-oriented notion of meaning, in a more democratic, subjective mode, among the equal voices of writer, reader, and character." It would seem that it is an alternative to be preferred. I have there not been Catholic and Jewish writers who use characters and individuals (Docherty would seem to find the words "anonymous" in the "Protestant" sense [it sees it?]) And despite the often-argued sense of Protestantism on "the rise of the self" there is really no sense in arguing that old-fashioned character (individual) is peculiarly Protestant phenomenon.

I am not suggesting that Docherty has written a disguised polemic—and there is much in his book to which I have not done justice, which will interest anyone interested in modern and post-Modern fiction. But I do feel some of the taut—and explicit—ideas are perverse and extreme (and at times false and sometimes just wrong). Apart from explicitly religious ideas—or ideas about religion—at the end, one general contention which would seem to be that in the modern movements in fiction "the life to be lived is the close of a novel is that of the 'other' character left, the reading subject". I write with the feeling that it would be a good thing in Docherty's view—if that last real character was not too much of a (Protestant) what about this from Schopenhauer—perhaps, one of the few writers not mentioned by Docherty: "Therefore the arts whose main representation of the Idea of man, have a problem, not only banality, the character of species, but also the character of the individual which is called, *par excellence*, character."

stands likewise as a kind of negative theologian, no longer striving for absolute truth but accepting (in Thomas Altizer's words) that "total affirmation . . . becomes possible only when the world appears as chaos, and man is liberated from every transcendent root and ground".

The trouble with these claims is that they smuggle back an ontological basis into Derrida's writings, even in the act of discountenancing any such argument. Thus Atkins can suggest—with a notable lack of deconstructive rigour—that "difference", "trace" and "supplementarity" are more or less synonymous with "God" in the kind of post-theological perspective here opened up. He can also call Hartman to witness that the atrocious labour of conceptual rhetoricians like de Man must finally manifest "a religious sense of the vanity of human understanding". This Johnsonian emphasis is carried over to the three short chapters on eighteenth-century texts that make up the illustrative centre-piece of Atkins's book. These all have to do with the "wandering" of sense through detours of figurative language, a condition that Atkins (loosely following de Man) treats as a veritable "allegory" of reading. Thus Dryden's "Religio Laci" seeks out a path between revealed and canonical truth, the dictates of individual conscience on the one hand and those of "authoritative" textual warrant on the other. In failing to resolve these antinomies, Atkins argues, it demonstrates that reading "as commonly understood" is strictly impossible activity. Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* gives plentiful scope for remark-

the metaphors, digressions and excremental nonsense which everywhere complicate the text. And so—unsurprisingly by his own Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot"—a text which exploits binary oppositions (Pope and the fops, writings, sexual miscreants, etc.) to find them collapsing one by one into the of uncontrolled figural crossings and reversals.

Atkins comes up with some odd arguments. More than once he opens up texts to a reading which their language solicits and actively resists. His chapters on Swift and Dryden show to good effect that deconstruction can do in its "analytical" form, as a variety of textual play, what which extends the methods of "Critical Criticism" by other, more sophisticated means. Less convincing are the arguments which simply take for granted a new-found dimension of interpretation. Where his book raises questions about trying to promote the rhetoric of "openness" to the status of a truth exempt from argument. The "advanced" theologian which Atkins appeals to can be seen in the negative inversion of the same argument. Atkins writes, "deconstruction as an agent of disillusionment"—and he pronounces that more than once in a complacent ingenuity. They also find around the rigours of deconstruction a favour of a certain ready-made

Versions of socialism

Julian Hilton

VOLKER BRAUN
Stücke
375pp. Berlin: Henschelverlag. DDR13.50M.

Strangers arriving on the British stage for the first time have a habit of coming quietly, and going unnoticed. Essex University recently gave the British premiere to Volker Braun's *Grosser Frieden* (Great Peace, 1976), one of the most significant German-language plays of the post-war period. A few days earlier eight of Braun's plays were published in East Berlin in the first substantial collection of his stage work. A brief review of his work is thus doubly apposite.

Braun, born in Dresden in 1939, belongs with Peter Hacks, Heiner Müller and Stefan Schütz, to a body of East German playwrights whose writings over the past three decades have been among the best work of that time. While in no sense a group (as the West German Group 47 is a group) they have in common the fact that between them they have reshaped the face of German-language theatre after the death of Brecht. Emerging from the hangover of Socialist Realism, they have not only found a profitable way back to the poetic and mythopoetic work of Goethe and Schiller, but also forward from the relatively limited formal experiments of Brecht towards a completely fluid dramaturgy.

Braun first made his mark as a poet, and his ear, and eye, for language are his most obvious strength. He likes puns, homophones, allusion and metrical finesse, though he is not a fierce rhetorician like Müller and Schütz can be. His

gods are Shakespeare, Schiller, Büchner and Beckett, and he is equally at home in the post-Socialist Realist aesthetic of *Die Kipper* (The Tippers, 1962-5) about workers in a sand yard, and the historical drama of China 2,000 years ago—*Grosser Frieden*.

Four themes dominate the collection: the crisis of unthinking and uncaring versions of socialism; the failure of the collective to accommodate individual aspiration; the moments of self-analysis in which radical change becomes personally and politically essential; and the need for a new aesthetic, that begins from scratch with each new work, a technique he derives from Shakespeare and Büchner in equal measure. Increasingly, these concerns take him away from the present—though not in flight—into history, seeking analogues for his own experience of creating the mythology and poetry of an essentially new state of mind. Hence the admiration for Shakespeare's language, which has for Braun that freshness of discovery that he pursues in the language of socialist Germany.

Braun's is no slavish defence of socialist orthodoxy, and some of his plays are still unperformable in the present climate. In *Tinka* he explores the frustrations of a woman forced to retreat under the demands of an old economic plan and who comes back to find her skills unwanted by the new plan. Where, he asks, is there room for people in over-planned, un-intelligent socialism? Schmittchen, in the play of that name, is a picturesque complement to Tinka, resistance to persuasion that socialism has re-defined the terms of human relationships defies Party principles. Most brilliantly, and wittily, Braun tackles the deficiencies of orthodoxy in the working-class Foust

play, *Hinze und Kunze* (1967-77), through a series of emblems, like Hinze writing "FREE-DOM" upside down on a tank, or Kunze looking at the sunrise and saying "We won't change that—yet." Socialism has evident limits for Braun, although he never fails to see its potential for mankind.

The full power of Braun's imagination emerges in the historical dramas, *Grosser Frieden* and *Dmitri* (1980). In their cycles of rebellion against repression, onarchy and re-establishment of oppression, Braun sees a mythic as well as a political dimension to an implicit socialist imperative, personal peripetia signalling the need for social trans-

formations. In this way the classical aesthetic of the reversal is integrated into Marxist theories of historical causality in a way that points to a mediation between the individual and the collective. Yet even here there is irony and ambiguity, which perhaps best summarize Braun's current aesthetic. Into the story of the pretender to the Tsarist throne, Dmitri, Braun builds a speech on the 1917 Revolution by the Third Speaker: "Then it is the Party's task seriously to think its way into the problem of what the masses want." Then comes the stage-direction: "He freezes in mid-text. Stage hands carry him off." It is an ironic reversal of perspective worthy of Büchner himself.

Fighting among the fans

Andrew Carpenter

ROBERT HOGAN
"Since O'Casey" and Other Essays on Irish Drama
Irish Literary Studies 15
176pp. Oerrords Cross: Colin Smythe. £9.95.
0389 203467
JAMES SIMMONS
Sean O'Casey
187pp. Macmillan. £11 (paperback, £3.95).
0333 308964
ROBERT G. LOWERY (Editor)
O'Casey Annual No.3
189pp. Macmillan. £25.
0333 324595

"Since O'Casey" and Other essays on Irish Drama is an oddly disjointed book, Robert Hogan suggests that this is a critical account of Irish play-writing, but the description hardly fits: some of the articles provide surveys of recent Irish theatre ("The Influence of Synge", and "The Influence of O'Casey", for instance), but the book is padded out with obituaries of recently departed actors and speculative comments on certain Dublin theatre companies. There is also an attack on Beckett—"an awful bore"—but the attack lacks intellectual fire and springs, as Mr Hogan admits, from a personal bias against "literature that evokes despair". There is a touch of academic journalism about this book, which is a pity since Mr Hogan's invaluable research on Irish theatre over the years has helped to make the systematic study of the field possible. The most important essays here are those grounded on research, the least important the converted lectures.

O'Casey's reputation is, to some extent, uncertain. Admirers excuse his every lapse, often allowing their enthusiasm to overcome their critical faculties. Denigrators, few but vociferous, fasten on to almost any part of his work with glee and tear it to pieces. As a result, books on O'Casey from the opposing camps seem to be about different writers. Hogan and James Simmons in *Sean O'Casey*, for instance, discuss what is virtually the same passage from the opening section of the first volume of O'Casey's autobiography: though they are working from different versions of the master-text, the contradictions in their judgments are surprising. Hogan considers "the writing 'masterly' and feels that it exhibits 'the fluid and economic swiftness of a good film'; for Simmons it is melodramatic, an example of

"the failed literary exhibitionism that spoils so many of the plays". The old adage about beauty being in the eye of the beholder seems peculiarly apt in the world of O'Casey criticisms.

Sean O'Casey, one of the Macmillan Modern Dramatists series, though ostensibly an introductory book is, in effect, an attack on the later O'Casey's taste, and on that of those who support him. Simmons appreciates the great middle plays, of course, but leavens his discussion of the later work with adjectives like "barnai", "nive", "sentimental", "crass", "pretentious", "dull", "lenden" and "incoherent". Is Simmons (like Swift) trying to expose a "gross corruption in learning"—the academic world's uncritical praise of the lesser work of a great writer—or is he, like O'Casey himself in *The Flying Wasp*, venting his spleen at others' taste? Even if it is just the latter—and Simmons may be justified in disturbing roosting pigeons—I wonder if an introductory book on O'Casey is the place for a shotgun blast like this:

There is something about O'Casey that attracts supporters rather than critics. *The O'Casey Review* has the aura of a football club rather than a literary magazine. . . . O'Casey can seem like an oasis of human interest in the desert of the Modern Movement; but the supporters seem to be not only anti-intellectual but tone deaf to the bargain, confining O'Casey's doggerel with poetry, his bad-tempered excesses with wit, and his pathetic sexual fantasies with vision.

All this is mixed with a certain amount of praise, as if Simmons is intermittently aware of the purpose of the book he is writing. It is an interesting exercise, but it produces a confused effect.

The O'Casey Annual (which since 1981 has superseded the *Review*) has the comfortable atmosphere of a club journal—though this is no football club, rather a thoroughly serious and academic one. Here is peace within recognized boundaries: the annual bibliography, a 68-page Index to *The Irish Worker*, O'Casey letters, O'Casey and Joyce, O'Casey and Brecht, O'Casey and epiphany, O'Casey and the Marxist critics. The whole exercise seems designed for the quietly confident converted: so are all such journals, but some are more lively than others.

Recent volumes in Gill and Macmillan's "Irish Lives" series include *G. B. Shaw* by John O'Donovan (55p. £3.95. 0 7171 1039 7) and *Oscar Wilde* by Richard Pine (156pp. £3.95. 0 7171 1163 6).

Transcendent vanities

Chris Norris

G. DOUGLAS ATKINS
Reading Deconstruction/Deconstructive Reading
158pp. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. £18.
08131 14934

"Seek and ye shall find" is fast becoming the watchword of American deconstruction. Seek out themes of "textuality", aporia or figural "undecidability", and they tend to turn up wherever the eye hits print. At worst this becomes a routine programme for recycling texts already worked over to exhaustion by other, currently less fashionable, critical methods. At best it can produce readings of a potabile analytic power and grasp. G. Douglas Atkins doesn't hold with such loaded distinctions, though he does worry briefly that deconstruction may soon be co-opted as "simply another method for the interpretation of texts". But in general he is happy enough to carry on interpreting so long as this means an end to the bad old pretensions of "theory" as some kind of privileged master-discourse.

Such is the lesson of deconstruction as Atkins enjoins us to read it. His argument—which term had better be placed appropriately *sous rature*—finds warrant in the texts of Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and (less plausibly) Paul de Man. From Derrida it takes the congenial message that the truth-claims of theory are always and everywhere undone by a play of figural "undecidability" beyond their

are more "rigorous" than theirs—or that the same distinction holds between, say, Hartman and de Man—is no part of Atkins's story. He takes it as read that deconstruction places insuperable problems in the way of any systematizing drive toward method or theory. His book thus presents itself as "deliberately essayistic, with all that that entails".

The entailments are various and not altogether beneficial. Atkins makes a point of constantly changing gear, from exposition to critique and thence to a generalized commentary on deconstruction and its wider (religious and ideological) bearing. The shifts are smoothly managed and designed to exemplify his claim that such distinctions in any case no longer hold good once their logic is subject to deconstructive reading. But this technique of chastening the desire for method can sometimes work to impose its own kind of premature methodical abstractions. Atkins has a habit of picking out Derridean key-terms like *trace* and *différance*, fixing their sense by selective contextual definition and then treating them as so many themes to be glossed in terms of their deeper metaphysical import.

Most significant for Atkins are the signs of a current rapprochement between deconstruction and theology: Derrida points the way beyond nihilism, he argues, to a form of affirmative demystification that would finally transcend the nostalgic craving for origins, divine or otherwise. Thus Atkins interprets Hillis Miller's critical odyssey—from *The Disappearance of God* to his recent, deconstructive essays—as an attempt to recover transcendent

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Figures of authority

Julia Briggs

JONATHAN GOLDBERG
James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their contemporaries
292pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £23.
0801829712

The complex relationship between both king and poet, and their words which might regulate men's outer or inner lives, fascinate historians and critics alike. Renaissance commentators observed parallels between the authority of author and governor, and the advent of printing was soon to alter the balance of power between them in favour of the writer. Contemporary consciousness of this relationship and its manifold workings through court patronage make the late English Renaissance under Elizabeth and the Stuart an appropriate context in which to consider the whole issue. Jonathan Goldberg in *James I and the Politics of Literature* has chosen a moment when the transformation of royal policy into art can be fully documented, as can be the uses adopted by writers anxious to give both Macenas and the Muse their due. James I, like his predecessor, wrote poetry, and fancied himself as a scholar and an author; he took an active interest in writers and expected them to return the compliment. The greatest beneficiaries of his patronage, Jonson and Donne, were not merely great writers but greatly learned, and this the king recognized, valued and encouraged. The Stuarts had many failings, but even their enemies could not accuse them of being uncultured.

With no shortage of relevant material, the major problem is how to organize it most tellingly, how best to represent the elaborate interaction of official attitudes and their creative reinterpretation, the moulding of political accident into literary substance. Professor Goldberg is rightly eager to take in a wide variety of authors, and he extends his discussion to include pageantry and portraiture as well; his account shows detailed knowledge – of James's letters to Buckingham, for example. Yet what are here termed the "lines of power" that link the different stages of the argument are not subject to any conventional logic, as the author himself admits: "The purpose of this enquiry is, not to argue causality or to suggest influence in one direction or another", and, eleven pages later, "Causality is not the point. Were it not to reify language overmuch, we might say that history and staged history share the reality of language." So do the majority of human activities, but the generality of such a statement renders it almost meaningless. In abandoning causality, in refusing to link one statement or event to another except through puns or common phrases, Professor Goldberg opens the door to an arbitrariness of judgment that would be alarming if it ever resolved itself into definite statements.

The chosen starting point of the book is King James's own discourse, his poems and writings, and the way that the image projected therein was taken up and re-examined (remembered? disremembered?) by other writers – by Jonson in his court masques and plays, by Donne in some of his love poems and religious writings, as well as by the playwrights who dramatized "the swelling act of the imperial theme". We are told: "The Roman plays that came to claim the stage in the Jacobean period reflect the style of the monarch and James's sense of himself as royal actor." Among those discussed at some length are *Julius Caesar* (1599) and Jonson's *Sejanus* (1604), plays written before James's style had become apparent, even though one later commentator did compare him to Tiberius. Chronological lapses of this kind highlight a more general problem which Goldberg never really confronts: certain kinds of discourse – concerning the status of the monarchy or the character of the Roman Empire, for example – were already commonplaces of political thought before James wrote or reigned. He might take them up, thus renewing their force, but, in another sense, he was taken up by them; he could only discuss the role of the monarch within the terms of the actions and words available to him, within the limitations dictated by political contingency, so that his discourse may be thought of as a reiteration, less free and less

autonomous than that of his less responsible protégés.

In tracing out "lines of power" Goldberg prefers to focus on words, on particular phrases, rather than on events or ideas. He is sensitive to language, but sometimes sees significant allusions in resemblances so remote as to be accidental: for example, Chapman's warning to "prejudicate and peremptory" readers in the preface to a poem on Somerset's wedding is said to be "reminiscent of James's description of those who judge the king through 'pre-occupied conceits'"; Chapman thus "fully appropriated to himself royal inscrutability". But warnings not to prejudge are so characteristic of addresses to readers at this period that any specific connection looks unlikely. In a comparable way the phrase "state secrets" is used to link a number of dissimilar texts, and after introducing the question of religious mysteries, it is stretched even further: because "The kingdom was, quite literally, in James's body, the arcana made flesh", it approaches the question of marriage and Jacobean family life. Leaps of this kind, depending on verbal sleights-of-hand, pervade the book and are difficult to refute since they seldom rise to positive assertions, though every now and then the tendency to equate everything with everything else results in a statement as vacuous as "Monarchs and dramatists speak the same language, pursue the same concerns."

Although Goldberg has rejected the historian's narrow insistence on causality for a more comprehensive interest in texts, he is not en-

tirely unfamiliar with the work of historians, and criticizes Burckhardt on the grounds that he "projected modern man back on to the Renaissance" in failing to recognize that "we tend to devalue the public and to elevate the private". For the Jacobines, "privacy is a negative category, for what is not seen, does not exist". Yet it was just such private values, or inward promptings, that persuaded men so different as Luther and More, Charles V and Montaigne to reject the claims of society. Politics and religion increasingly focused on the clash between the interests of the state and the convictions of the heart. Evidently this was an age of public enactment, of power and authority, of punishment and religious observation, but it was also the first to distrust such enactments and to question their inwardness. Lionel Trilling identified the seeds of the modern demand for "sincerity and authenticity" in late Renaissance society.

The tendency to read the past in terms of the present is almost unavoidable because of the shifts in vocabulary that constantly invite us to think anachronistically. Goldberg makes the mistake he attributes to Burckhardt in referring to James throughout as an "absolutist", a favourite word which he also applies to figures as dissimilar as Bussy D'Ambois and Volpone (inaccurately termed "sly wolf"); their supposed absolutism enables him to interpret them as covert comments on the king. Other stage heroes are assimilated to the same pattern: Coriolanus, described by his mother as "too absolute", thus becomes "as devoted to the absolutist project as Bussy D'Ambois".

Goldberg here shows himself a victim of the Circian powers of language that he is attempting to circumscribe. The characters he has in mind are in fact agnosts or solipsists who try to impose their wills or values on the world around them; dramatists from Marlowe onwards had been fascinated by such types. They are no more "absolutist" than James was. In fact the whole concept of absolutism is a comparatively recent one – there are no examples of its use in this sense before the nineteenth century, and its application to James, as to Coriolanus or any other dramatic hero, is quite inappropriate. It further promotes misunderstanding of contemporary reactions to James. For this age that accepted monarchy as natural, a king's failure was measured in terms of the exercise of tyrannical powers (how tyrannical should be dealt with was passionately debated). James, for all his silliness and grossness, had nothing of the tyrant in him, and he did not conform precisely to the idea of a "godly prince", he at least made some effort to do so. The harshest criticisms of him came from those closest to him. Goldberg's book's structuralist strategy, directing attention to texts rather than contexts, and this is all to the good, but to read the texts aright requires familiarity with the ideas and attitudes of the society that produced them, and in this respect he is not a reliable guide. It is also vital to recognize the extent to which our own approach is linguistically predetermined; Professor Goldberg is as firmly imprisoned within modern political clichés as any Stuart king was locked in his own vision and that of his age.

Feelings of imprisonment

Kate Flint

JENNIFER GRIBBLE
The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel
222pp. Macmillan. £20.
0333350197

KATHLEEN BLAKE
Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature: The art of self-postponement
254pp. Harvester Press/Barnes and Noble. £25.

0710805608 (Harvester)
0389204250 (Barnes and Noble)

GEORGE WATT
The Fallen Woman in the 19th-Century English Novel
229pp. Croom Helm/Barnes and Noble. £15.95.
0709927819

In *Women in Love*, Birkin complains to Ursula about "all that Lady of Shalott business": the Victorian romanticism inherent in attitudes towards love with which he, and D.H. Lawrence, were exasperated. Both Jennifer Gribble, in *The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel*, and Kathleen Blake, in *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature*, take the idea of the Lady of Shalott figure – enclosed, waiting, with only a tightly circumscribed view of the world to gaze at – for the starting point of their studies of the Victorian novel. For Gribble, she is an archetype: not just of the nineteenth-century woman, half-sick of the shadows of her domestic existence, but of the contemplative yet stifled consciousness found throughout the fiction of the period, present in Arthur Clennam and in Lucy Snowe, in Jude as well as in Sue Bridehead; a preoccupation of male as well as female characters and authorship. So concerned is she to maintain that both sexes undoubtedly experience "imprisonment", that this experience is no more "real" for women than for men; that she suppresses the fact that, historically, there were opportunities for Dorothea and Lydgate, which ensure that the provincial repressiveness of Middlemarch does not exert so stifling a pressure on their ardour. Sliding over such differences, she moves to her central tenet: that from emotion generated in boudoirs, in cells, springs the energy of the imagination. She quotes Shelley to remind us that this energy is the greatest instrument of moral good. It is this force which, initially emanating from an intense contemplative situation, spreads out, according to Gribble, to take on shape, the "creative endeavour" of the

heart of each novel. The web woven by the Lady can represent the small thread-like pressures of society, but more importantly, for her, it stands for the many-angled texture of the mind, which suffers difficulties assimilating the demands of the larger world. Gribble is at her most convincing when demonstrating this in relation to *The Wings of the Dove*, showing each character so enmeshed in their "box of consciousness" that, as the structure of the text makes clear, they know far more about themselves than they ever reveal to each other, or to the reader. They are examples of the heightened, yet non-communicative self-consciousness which Lawrence was so anxious to repudiate.

Gribble's work, though based on an intriguing idea, suffers not only from lack of critical and historical precision, but from an attempt to impose a mythic model already heavily circumscribed by the tricky imagery of webs and mirrors. Blake is far more exciting and successful in her attempt to show the positive, rather than the limiting aspects of "self-postponement" – the term used by William Michael Rossetti to describe both the life and the poetic preoccupations of his sister Christina. Writing within an Anglo-American tradition of empiricism and close reading, Blake's methodology is both clear and self-justifying. She challenges the post-Freudian feminist assumptions which link erotic expression to self-assertion and creativity, and hence regard its repression or deliberate impression as axiomatically a bad thing. Rather, she shows how woman's self-postponement within love, and resistance towards it, offer promising material: in Christina Rossetti's patiently waiting brides, where, as so often in her work, secular shades into spiritual allegory; in *Middlemarch*, where Dorothea's moral growth can only occur when she herself berates her own demands within marriage; in *Villiers*, where Lucy Snowe develops an ability to profit by pain – indeed, it could be argued, derives her personal strength from a pattern of promised but never-reached fulfilment.

Self-postponement is not necessarily a desirable state of affairs, but Blake shows that it could be necessary. She traces the debate on aestheticism and erotic restraint from Wollstonecraft through to the *Preraphaelites*, and then shows its externalization, and the psychological and social conflicts it raised, both in Sue Bridehead and in Clissie's equally appropriately named Rhoda Nunn. Her concluding

recent feminist criticism to stress not so much how women are presented, but how they write. She maintains that a form of self-postponement often constituted the condition for artistic vocation when an artist was a woman: an idea examined both by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh*, and by George Eliot in the interesting but unread *Amorpha*. Then, with close biographical detail, Blake applies this idea to the life of Olive Schreiner, and her inability to conclude *From Main to Man*. Only at this point does her social specificity wane a little surely, whether in the nineteenth century or today, there are material as well as psychic difficulties attendant on simultaneous involvement with family, home and literary career?

In the light of Blake and Gribble's practice-taking a characteristic state of mind, and seeing what it lends to the narrative and poetic organization of a work – George Watt's study, *The Fallen Woman in the 19th-Century English Novel*, is somewhat conservative in its context-based premises. Nevertheless, there has been a space for the treatment of this theme, and he traces it from *Ruth*, through Trollope, George, and Turgenev to the non-moralizing naturalism of *Esther Waters*, he provides an effective survey of Victorian social attitudes as presented and challenged in fiction, and as reflected in the frequently shocked response to such texts. He substantiates the view that middle-class morality depended on the polarization of woman's sexuality into the categories of pure and dutiful, or fallen, and underlines the fact that the Victorians were simultaneously well aware of their hypocrisy in such matters. But when Watt asserts that only at the end of the century was the "fall" of the working-class girl, bringing with it some different social assumptions, treated in fiction, we become aware of the narrowness of limiting the subject to one genre. There is no discussion, for example, of the predicament of Marian Erle in *Aurora Leigh*, which helped ensure the poem's success as a scandal, nor of Redgrave's painting "The Outcast", nor of Rossetti's "Flood". Nor is the subject taken through into the twentieth century, even by allusion: what, for example, of Forster's use of the theme? Watt is, however, acute about the way in which the fallen girls who fell were themselves influenced by cultural forms: by romantic fiction, and social expectations which promoted the dream of "ideal" of being swept off and fulfilled by "love". The imaginary figure of the "bold Sir Lancelot" brought a bit home some real physical

Liminal recreations

Vincent Crapanzano

VICTOR TURNER
From Ritual to Theatre: The human seriousness of play
127pp. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. \$6.95.
0933826176

There are people like the Arunta of the Australian outback, the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia and the Nuer of the White Nile who enjoy anthropological celebrity because of the brilliance of a single ethnographer (or, in the case of the Arunta, two). They enter our ethnographic imagination. Their social, cultural, or ritual arrangements become a model for social, cultural, or ritual arrangement. And so they seem to transcend their particularity – becoming figures in a social allegory. The Ndembu, who live in tiny villages in the woodlands of north-western Zambia, are one of these people, and Victor Turner, who died last December, was their ethnographer.

When Turner first went to Zambia in the early 1950s – it was Northern Rhodesia then – most of the Ndembu's neighbours were suffering in their contact with the white man, with his copper mines and his railways, but the Ndembu, at least to Turner, seemed to have retained rich cultural and religious traditions. They were obviously a stubborn people. They were also a jealous, individualistic, strife-ridden people, troubled by mischievous spirits, witches and ancestral ghosts who were quick to punish Ndembu who failed to "renambar" them. Ndembu men struggled bitterly with one another for headmanship, prestige and money. Villages were always on the verge of breaking up. Turner, in his first and in many ways his best book, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, 1957, suggested that this instability was the result of a contradiction in Ndembu social organization between matrilineal descent and residence in one's husband's village, which put Ndembu men in the paradoxical position of trying to keep their wives and children with them while urging their own sisters (whose support they needed in their quest for village headmanship) to leave their husbands and return to their "proper" village. Village continuity seemed to depend on marital discontinuity.

This contradiction affected every dimension of Ndembu life. Marriages were fragile, conflict was rampant. Men were only too ready to marginalize those unhappy Ndembu souls who did not make their claim for leadership. Symptomatically, the meek and powerless were often afflicted with illness and then subjected to elaborate curing rites that gave symbolic expression to their conflicts and incorporated them into curing cults. Turner says that what little unity existed among the Ndembu was enforced by these rituals.

In those days, British social anthropologists were mainly interested in social and political organization; they had a kind of bureaucratic vision. Unlike their French and to an extent their American colleagues, they were not much interested in ritual and belief, which they considered to be "secondary"; somehow, to social, political and economic structures. Turner himself, in one of his later books, *The Ritual Process*, 1969, described his own initial antipathy to ritual:

Yet I felt uneasily that I was always on the outside looking in . . . For I was constantly aware of the thudding of ritual drums in the vicinity of my camp, and the people I knew would often take their leave of me to spend days at a time attending such exotically named rites as *Nkomo*, *Wubwanga*, and *Wubinda*. Eventually, I was forced to recognize that if I wanted to know what even a segment of Ndembu culture was really about, I would have to overcome my prejudice against ritual and start to investigate it.

As it happened, the "thudding of ritual drums" gave Turner his key to Ndembu society. It also gave him the occasion to elaborate more general theories of symbolic interpretation, social process, and ritual transition which have become the foundation for much contemporary symbolic anthropology. Turner himself was never an analytic thinker. He accumulated models and metaphors and rarely considered their compatibility or their linkage. But he did write a great many books and drew around him some of the most talented students in anthropology in the United States, where he taught for the last twenty years of his life. Rites

of passage, curing rituals, pilgrimages, communitarian movements, revolutions and those (almost impossible to characterize) moments of intense creativity that occur in "creative centres" of industrial society absorbed him.

From *Ritual to Theatre*, Turner's last book, is – broadly – about the social and cultural roots of creativity, about play, performance and human freedom. The book is basically an attempt to relate to contemporary theatre notions of social drama that he first developed in his analysis of Ndembu village history. He did his field-work, so to speak, in New York at Richard Schechner's Performing Garage Theater, and Turner's social drama involves a spontaneous, essentially agonistic social process with a characteristic form. It begins with "a breach of regular norm-governed social relations" that sends a kind of *frisson* through a social group – an Ndembu village, say – shattering fragile alliances, bringing latent animosities to the surface. A crisis develops fast: people take sides, factions, coalitions and cabals form; violence sometimes occurs. The group's unity and continuity are threatened. Leaders initiate redressive measures – arbitration, juridical procedures, public rituals. In traditional societies such dramas end with either the reintegration of the disturbed social group or the recognition of irreparable schism. In more complicated societies, as Turner understands them, social dramas can end in "real" structural changes – in revolutions. Becket's struggle with Henry II, the Hidalgo Insurrection in Mexico, the Dreyfus Affair, Watergate, the occupation of the American Embassy in Tehran – all of these, for Turner, are social dramas. He argues that theatre has its source in these social dramas, particularly in ritual. Articulated and performed, it reflects and, to an extent, determines the social dramas that produce it. Turner, oblivious to cliché, is telling us that life mirrors art.

Ritual seems to have been the Ndembu's favourite redressive genre. In *The Drums of Affliction*, 1968, Turner wrote in almost unreadable detail about how political and social tensions in one thoroughly depressed Ndembu village were articulated – and in a way resolved – through the performance of *hamba*, a painful ritual for curing people afflicted by the ghosts of "forgotten" hunters. Because of British administrative decisions, the village was left without a strong leader. Many villagers had moved away, and those who remained fared poorly as hunters and farmers. They believed themselves under siege by jealous ghosts. Then, one of them, Kamahassanyi, a rather ineffectual character, dominated as a boy by his father, cuckolded by his wife, fell ill. He complained of heart palpitations, pains in his arms and legs, and bad dreams. Diviners discovered that Kamahassanyi was "penetrated" by the incisors of two ancestors – a maternal "grandfather" and his own father – and required *hamba*. It was in every sense a painful ritual. Kamahassanyi became a sort of village scapegoat. His blood was cupped, and the villagers had to confess their many grudges against him. For Turner, his illness represented the village's illness. His siege by his grandfather symbolized political problems over headmanship; his siege by his father symbolized the conflict between them and, ultimately, between matrilineality and loyalty to his father's line. Apparently Kamahassanyi's cure did reinforce traditional matrilineal ties in the village. But the cure could not restructure the village any more than it could restructure the village's relationship to the British.

Turner's analysis of Kamahassanyi's case is without much psychological subtlety. Like other social anthropologists of his age and training, he assumed that in societies like the Ndembu – societies ordered by rules of kinship – personality is less interesting, and certainly less of a subject, than status and role. The argument was that individuals are fabled by their social position – and subject to all the conflict that arises from it. Thus Kamahassanyi's illness had less to do with "personality" as we understand the word, than with his conflict-ridden position in the village. The situation in an Ndembu village, Turner wrote, "closely parallels that found in Greek drama where one witnesses the helplessness of the human individual before the Fates: but in this case the Fates are the necessities of social process."

In *From Ritual to Theatre* Turner calls rituals "scanning devices whereby the difficulties and conflicts of the present are articulated and given meaning through contextualization in an abiding cosmological scheme". He suggests (following the American anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff) that ritual not only reflects its participants' social world but makes them self-conscious.

It is easy to argue that Turner "theatricalized" ritual when he attributed to it a kind of mirroring distance. Were the Ndembu participating in Kamahassanyi's cure really conscious of their own consciousness? Did they really see their own reflection in Kamahassanyi and his affliction? I doubt it. We can "read" rituals (and other cultural performances) as "texts", as "commentaries", "metacommentaries", "narratives", or "dramas" – these are all fashionable models in anthropology today – but unless these "texts" are defined this way by the people actually performing them, we cannot assume their role as commentaries. Human beings are as capable of compartmentalizing as they are of analogizing. Ritual, in any case, is not normally defined for its participants – certainly not for the Ndembu – as social commentary. If it were, it would probably lose its power. It is understood by its own intention – which is to cure, for example, people haunted by jealous ghosts. Exegesis, where it exists, exists to support that intention and thus the society, and its norms and values.

In his later work, Turner is unwilling to accept this conservative view of ritual. He insists that ritual transforms, that ritual symbols are open to new "meanings" and that these new meanings can effect structural changes in relatively stable socio-cultural systems. In a way, he has forgotten poor Kamahassanyi and the other Ndembu who were constrained by their social understanding, powerless before colonial rule, and who none the less enacted cures which seem magical to the outsider – not because they were symbolic but because they were irrelevant to a new colonial reality.

In his earlier books – *Schism and Continuity*, *The Forest of Symbols*, *The Drums of Affliction* – Turner understood that transformations occurred within the given structures of society and did not affect those fundamental structures. He was aware of the pathos, if not the tragic dimension, of such rituals, and this may be why his earlier work kept its intellectual hard-edged even when it did not take into account the more flexible, creative moments of social life that came to fascinate him later.

In *The Ritual Process*, Turner distinguished the structural model of society – the status, roles and offices usually described by anthropologists – from an "anti-structural" model that he called *communitas*. *Communitas* has a happy ring to it. It is rather like Ginzburg's ideal *comunionem*. Turner himself described it as "an undifferentiated, homologous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as 'segmentalized' into status and roles". His "communitas" echoed the utopias of many millenarian and monastic movements. It was "an alternative and more 'liberated' way of being socially bu-

mn, a way of being detached from social structure – and hence potentially of periodically evolving its performance."

Turner derived "communitas" from his studies of the *liminal*, the betwixt and between of ritual, the place where, to quote Wallace Stevens, "you yourself were never quite yourself." During the liminal phase of ritual, the neophyte, separated from his ordinary world, is in a distinct, transitional world, in and out of time, where secular distinctions of rank and status give way to an egalitarian camaraderie – to *communitas*. Turner believed that during such rituals, the participants are "released from structure into communitas only to return to structures revitalized by the experience of communitas".

In *From Ritual to Theatre*, the liminal – ritual – is described as the "seedbed" of cultural creativity. Liberated from the constraints of structure, the ritual participants are supposedly able to "play" with elements of the familiar in novel ways. But even Turner had to admit that in tribal societies there is a limit to novelty. Roles tend to be homogeneous. Rituals are obligatory. Once Kamahassanyi's illness is diagnosed, *hamba* or some other ritual has to follow. Whatever symbolic play occurs during its performance is both ritually and socially constrained. Turner insisted that in complex, industrial societies – where work and leisure are differentiated – liminal moments can be truly inventive. Here, in experimental theatre, art and music, in innovative scholarship and, presumably, in the be-ins, consciousness-raising and peace marches of the past twenty years, there is room for genuinely creative play. Unlike tribal rituals, these "leisure genres" – Turner called them "liminoid phenomena" – are optional, often individual, marginal, fragmentary, idiosyncratic and subversive.

It may be that a few months at the Performing Garage can turn any professor into a *porte-parole* for bohemia, but Turner often had difficulty distinguishing the event from its gloss, its ideology, its exegesis. In a way, he was trapped in the fantasies of his own Anglo-American culture, with its modernist emphasis, its faith in the novel and the new, its celebration of inventiveness. He ignored the fact that the most subversive genres will still – in their very subversion – constitute the values they are trying to subvert. The most experimental theatre is "experimental" only in contrast to conventional theatre. I would argue that even in industrial societies the unfamiliar is rarely as unfamiliar as it seems. "Communitas" has to be set against structure, the ritually creative ("liminal" or "liminoid") against the ritually conservative, against convention, repetition, insistence and tyranny. We are all a little like the Ndembu, caught in insistent allegories which we call social understanding and, if we are not careful, ritualize through our sociologies and anthropologies. In his final book Turner looked beyond his routinized discipline to an anthropology of experience, which he understood etymologically as "a journey, a test (of self, of suppositions about others), a ritual passage, an exposure to peril or risk, a source of fear". We must admire him for this.

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Pre-eminently polyphonic

David Fallows

HOWARD MAYER BROWN (Editor)
A Florentine Chansonnier from the time of
Lorenzo the Magnificent: Florence, Biblioteca
Nazionale Centrale MS Banco Rari 229
Volume 1, Text: 331pp.
Volume 2, Music: 657pp.
University of Chicago Press. £127.50 (hbk),
0226 076237

It was Sir John Stainer who in 1896 first called the world's attention to the qualities of the fifteenth-century French song repertory with the publication of his *Dufay and his Contemporaries*. In his musicological work, the composer of the much-reviled *Crucifixion* showed an aesthetic judgment so keen and novel that no student of the music can yet afford to ignore his insights or his transcriptions (several of which, in the British Library and still unpublished, show substantial improvements on more recent editions of the same songs). Stainer's lead was followed by the Danish scholar Knud Jeppesen, another man generally better known for his work in another field, namely his study of Palestrina's style which is still an indispensable textbook. In *Der Kopenhagener Chansonnier* (1927) he mapped out the repertory for the second half of the century as Stainer had done for the first half; and his substantial introduction to the volume remains one of the finest available statements on the chanson, arguing that it can be placed alongside Italian baroque opera, the Viennese symphony and American jazz as one of the crucial and most influential currents in the whole of music history.

Since then the enormous growth of historical research has increasingly favoured that repertory. Most of the important composers have now received complete editions. Several of the main sources have been luxuriously published in *extenso*, and many of the others have been fully transcribed in easily obtained doctoral theses. Further sources have benefited from book-length studies of which the most influential is Allan Atlas's two-volume *The Cappella Giulia Chansonnier* (1975-6), with its brilliant analysis of the interrelationships between various sources from the last twenty years of the century and its conclusive demonstration that in those years Italy was the richest home of French polyphonic song.

Supremely classical

H. C. Robbins Landon

GIORGIO PESTELLI
The Age of Mozart and Beethoven
Translated by Eric Cross
323pp. Cambridge University Press. £19.50
(paperback, £8.95).
0521 241499

There was an urgent need for a survey of this kind; the appropriate volume in the New Oxford History of Music (Volume VII: *The Age of Enlightenment*, 1973) was born under an unlucky star, and the intervening years have not improved its fragmented contents and disparate approach. The long-awaited "classical" volume in the Donjon-Norton series was assigned to Daniel Heartz but has not yet appeared, and Charles Rosen's now standard classic (*The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, 1971, revised 1973) was never intended to be a survey of European music in that period. Hence one opens this small, neat book with very great expectations.

In every respect it is a brilliant achievement. Written in clear (though often very closely reasoned) prose, it is full of striking ideas and the translation is so good that one has the impression of reading a book conceived in lucid English. For a long time Italy has been rather out of musical scholarship in the classic period, and if Italian scholars sometimes seemed on past occasions to be both rather isolated and slightly chauvinistic, Giorgio Pestelli has achieved an admirably unprejudiced and truly European approach. The book proceeds from instrumental music (the *grosso stile* of the Italian and German Baroque),

Howard Mayer Brown's long-awaited edition and study of a Florentine manuscript from around 1490 must now take pride of place among all these publications. His manuscript contains 268 pieces, amounting to nearly one quarter of extant French secular polyphony from the second half of the century. The commentary and lists of concordant sources are marked by the scrupulous care, accuracy and knowledge of the repertory that have always given Professor Brown a position of unbalanced eminence among historians of music from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Beyond these matters, though, I would consider the most important feature of the edition to be its practicality: where full texts survive for a song he places all stanzas under the music, and he is more generous than other editors in underlaying text to the lower parts (which were certainly often sung). The layout of the page is exceptionally clear, as well as economical. From this edition, as from very few other editions of the repertory, it is possible for a group of performers to sit down and concentrate immediately on purely musical problems without any further adjustments. Brown has taken an unusually large proportion of the necessary editorial decisions and taken them sensibly.

While it is not to say that everybody will agree with all his conclusions. In an effort to achieve a certain consistency he is inclined to add editorial accidentals so that a melodic line that is uninflected in the manuscript will sometimes move almost immediately from a flattened second degree of the scale to a raised leading note, with a curious "Neapolitan" effect that seems inappropriate for music of that generation; and surprisingly often he will add accidentals that create a diminished triad of the kind that he says he wishes to avoid. I would also be inclined to think that his views on texting are open to discussion as being too strongly founded on the notion of a static style and too generalized for so wide a range of individual pieces. Brown appears to believe that the long melismatic lines can be texted in only one correct way and that they normally begin syllabically, generating and increasing flow towards their cadence. Yet the very imprecision of the manuscript texting suggests a much looser approach to the matching of words and music, with the main emphasis on the flow of the line which is surely among the prime glories of the songs from the years 1450 to 1480. And moving on from there, Brown argues for the practice of

text-repetition despite the visual evidence of the sources: nobody could deny that words and phrases were indeed sometimes repeated, but it would be easy to counter that it happened rather less often in this particular group of pieces than he suggests. Precisely the some could be said about his argument that the full roodeau form was often curtailed in the last years of the century. So there are many cases where the critical reader of the music would wish to adjust Brown's editions; but at the same time nothing here is unquestionably wrong, and the editions will serve their purposes considerably better than most of those currently available.

More than that, Brown cuts through the morass of indigestible material on musical variant readings to which we are so often treated, and does so with remarkable boldness and integrity. For the commentary proper he tends to confine himself to listing the many sources, printing the text with two translations (one in prose, the other in verse) and making a few comments on the piece. He states that the "technique of listing only the most important variants reveals clearly the kind of editorial revision late fifteenth-century music underwent in the years following its composition". Brown presents that information on the music pages and presents it more clearly than any earlier editor: if he had done nothing else, his book would still have been a study of the very first importance.

As the new general editor of this famous series, *Monuments of Renaissance Music*, Brown has reduced the page-size and made the volumes much easier to handle than their predecessors; and he has given careful thought to the optimum use of his format. On the other hand there are perhaps disadvantages in being one's own general editor. Another pair of eyes would surely have eliminated some of the typographical errors, which are rather more abundant here than in normal in a work of such external and internal quality. Another pair of authoritative eyes might also have noted that some 300 pages of double-column introductory material need a proper index, for they are crammed with detailed information that is sometimes difficult to relocate.

The introduction is a model of its kind. Over the past fifteen years or so it seems that virtually every scholar concerned with the repertory has been privileged to see Brown's typescript; so very few of the actual conclusions are new.

second-generation Mannheim) as well as Boccherini, Puccini as well as Gluck, and to see why Rossini made such a mark on weary Europe, pushing aside Beethoven's late works in Vienna. Connoisseurs came slowly to Beethoven in Paris and London, too, but they came equally slowly to Mozart, who left nineteenth-century Mozart and Beethoven arrived more or less simultaneously in a capital like Paris. It has taken history a long while to lift reality from fancy in such confused circumstances: Sammartini is now thought to be as seminal to the symphony as Johann Stamitz. In order to write this deft survey, Professor Pestelli has had to listen to enormous amounts of music and read quantities of books and articles; but more than by his great knowledge, one is impressed by his powers of synthesis and critical observation, as for example in his summary of Mozart's achievement:

Considered as a whole, the extraordinarily diverse span of Mozart's creativity, from the international re-echo of the early years to the *Ave verum* and *Die Zauberflöte* is valued for what it is, a true internal revolution which extended the possibilities of communication through music to unknown limits. Mozart left behind a musical language that was incomparably enriched, not so much in technique as in syntax, in the violation of the destructive eighteenth-century sediment of strophic regularity. Mozart's oscillation between *Gemüthsruhe* (serenity) and *Schmerz* (nostalgic yearning), typically Austrian and marvellously portrayed by Moritz, was only the most metaphorical of the ambivalence brought about by his language: there were also those between demonic *Streben* and unconditional abandonment to events and the beauty of the present; and between aristocratic coldness or weary isolation and popular extroversion taken as far as the most outrageous hedonism and debauchery source for the

Nevertheless Brown argues each point with such elegance and persuasion that the book has values far beyond the details of its conclusions. For fifty pages he deftly supplies so enormous quantity of information on the outward aspect and compilation of the manuscript leading almost inevitably to the conclusion that it was originally compiled not for the Florentine diplomat whose arms appear at the beginning but for King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary.

More important, however, is the following section of the introduction which tackles the music and characterizes the various stages of its development during the thirty years leading up to the manuscript's compilation in about 1490. After an essay on the poetry—a topic to which music historians can obtain rather less help from literary scholars than might be expected for a cultural manifestation of such importance—he tackles the musical style. He first discusses the four main composers—Busnoys, Agricola, Martini and Isaac—largely with a view to pinpointing the four main stylistic directions represented in the manuscript, but also presenting superbly precise statements on the achievements of each. Then he discusses the lesser composers, finally approaching the large number of anonymous compositions. And if in these discussions we see little trace of what may seem the fundamental issues in considering the repertory, it must be said that there is now far more difficulty in answering those questions than there seemed to be twenty years ago.

And that remains the most urgent task. Nobody nowadays questions the extraordinary richness of fifteenth-century polyphonic song: the sheer range of ideas displayed by each of the leading composers attests to the correctness of Jeppesen's claim for its importance. Nor would anybody question that the nature of the repertory is as clear a guide as survives to the preferences and assumptions of the courtly culture as well as to its gradual changes in the historically crucial second half of the century. Equally it is quite clear that the audience for this music changed considerably as the nature of European society and its literate culture changed shape. But with the publication of Brown's study it may be time to stop editing the music, stop analysing the manuscripts, stop discussing some of the editorial problems it presents and concentrate on more pressing questions: who performed it, when, how and why?

cheerful vein of composers like Lortzing, Nicolai and Johann Strauss the Younger. Everything that had been separate and classifiable became mutually connected, and from this fusion comes the feeling of joy and the lump in one's throat that is the fingerprint of late Mozart.

Pestelli is unfailingly excellent about Beethoven and Gluck and the lesser Italians (such as Galuppi); he is, perhaps, less satisfying when discussing Haydn: the late masses "are works of tedious dignity with a senatorial tone" — hardly a fitting tribute to the Nelson Mass or *Missa in tempore belli*, though it is only fair to say that Pestelli, if not on the side of the angels, is certainly on the side of Charles Rosen.

The small slips in this splendid book are not worthwhile chronicling (I have sent them to the publisher for incorporation in what will soon be a second edition). The picture on the cover, not Professor Pestelli's fault — is described as an engraving of the interior of the Theater an der Wien during the first performance of one of the first two versions (1805 or 1806) of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. In fact it is a coloured engraving of 1825 showing an unknown opera with horses on the stage.

William S. Newman's three-volume history of the sonata, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (476pp. £9.95, 0393 952754), *The Sonata in the Classic Era* (933pp. £11.95, 0393 952754) and *The Sonata since Beethoven* (870pp. £10.95, 952908) have recently been reissued in revised editions by Norton. The new editions are based on the 1972 revisions, which only appeared in paperback editions and they take in new material up to mid-1982. The three volumes were received with qualified praise in the TLS of October 25, 1983. May 2, 1983 and September 11, 1970. reissued.

Captions courageous

Antonia Phillips

MICHEL FOUCAULT
This is not a pipe
With illustrations and letters by René Magritte
Translated, with an introduction by James Harkness
66pp. University of California Press. £10.95.
0520 042328

Michel Foucault's *This is not a pipe* is an entertaining and sometimes baffling essay on the relation between words and images in pictures. Foucault concentrates on the paintings of René Magritte because they seem both to exemplify the perplexities of this relation and to comment on them.

The most famous Magritte picture on this theme is one in which we see a simple, precisely delineated pipe floating in indeterminate space, and beneath it, in a careful, childish hand, the inscription: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. The strangeness of the painting does not rest in a contradiction between "the text and the figure" (for a statement cannot contradict an image, but only another statement, or itself) but rather, Foucault argues, in a combination of two things: the perennial custom of taking the text as a caption to the image, indicating what the image represents, and "the impossibility of defining a perspective that would let us say that the assertion is true, false or contradictory". The result is a shifting ambiguity, a "sorcery" which Foucault diagnoses as being the result of a secret "calligram".

A calligram marries a text with a shape so as to bring them together as closely as possible, making the text say what the shape represents, and thus aspiring "playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilisation: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read". Foucault takes these pairs as mutually exclusive, and does not question them. The calligram "never speaks and represents at the same moment" and it has an evasiveness which, he thinks, Magritte's picture shares. Just as with the calligram, reading the text excludes seeing the shape, so, he claims, with Magritte's image and text: "The drawn form of the pipe is so easily recognised that it excludes any explanatory or descriptive text."

If Foucault's hypothesis is taken literally (which, perhaps, it shouldn't be) an obvious objection arises: in the case of the calligram, the alleged exclusiveness is due to the fact that one configuration of lines constitutes alternately the text and the shape, much as one configuration ambiguously constitutes the duck and the rabbit in the well-known Duck-Rabbit figure. But there is not a single configuration in Magritte's picture which is both text and unmistakable pipe and so, whatever else may be said, the two cases are not assimilable in this easy way.

Foucault would not be ruffled by this prosaic objection, for he is not claiming that Magritte's picture is some sort of calligram, but that it has inherited some of the features of a calligram because it is made up of the fragments of one. What he imagines is that Magritte has performed an operation in which first, the sentence or text "invas" the figure in order to reconstitute an imagined ideogram, and then they are teased apart and returned to their proper places, figure above text according to the "old principle of distribution". But, Foucault continues — without hazardlog an explanation — things are only apparently as they were before the calligram/ideogram was created and "unravelling", for the words are now themselves drawn — "the image of a text" — and the shape of the pipe preserves "the patience of writing"; moreover, just when seeing the shape of the pipe leads us to anticipate the text that names it, the act of reading denies that the objects what it is. "Whence comes this strange game, if not from the calligram?"

Foucault does not stop with this ingenious fancy, for, as he acknowledges, it all depends

Beckmann's "Carnival", a small exhibition to mark the centenary of Max Beckmann's birth, will open at the Tate Gallery on May 16. An illustrated pamphlet will accompany the exhibition, which will centre on the Tate's "Carnival", 1920.

upon assuming both that the demonstrative in "This is not a pipe" refers to the figure, and that the inscription relates to the figure as a simple caption. Magritte's picture is ambiguous in further ways, and Foucault proceeds to point out some possibilities: "this" might refer to the image of the pipe, which of course is not a pipe; "this" might refer to itself, and a word is no more a pipe than is the image of a pipe; and by a Foucaultian act of doubling, "this" might refer to both text and figure. "Nowhere is there a pipe", he triumphs, agreeing, it seems, with the assertion of the inscribed sentence, which now comes out true, but at the price of disregarding the ancient custom of taking it as saying what the image represents.

Although Foucault suggests that the inscribed sentence may be itself represented, and not a straightforward caption, he never seems to doubt that words in pictures must function as text. But there is the possibility — one that has been exploited by other painters though, perhaps, not by Magritte himself — that words in pictures can function in a way other than as something to be read. They may be pictorial elements, for instance, like colour or brushstrokes. And even if what a word or sentence means is usually part of the reason it occurs in a picture, it need not be — the use of bits of newspaper in Cubist collage can be as stuff, or material, not as something to be read; or, perhaps, as something readable not to be read.

The title of a version of Magritte's pipe theme is particularly telling: "La trahison des images". The treachery runs both ways. On the one hand, the words, when a caption, are traitors to the image (that poor pipe); on the other, the image, this time the picture as a whole, betrays and unmans the words by absorbing them into itself. What Foucault does not fully admit is that once we agree, as Magritte's negation apparently forces us to do, that the inscribed words do not function as a conventional caption, we really have no right to be as sure as Foucault remains that those five words still are, or represent, a text to the image, in which "this" refers to something in the picture. We should consider the possibility that being embedded in the context of a picture may affect words more drastically than even Foucault imagines — in that context they may not be used meaningfully; or if they are they may not be related to the rest of the picture, including the pipe, in the usual ways; the words may not be in any sense about what the picture depicts.

We have no general understanding of what constraints govern the relation between words and image in pictures once the former are not simple captions, like those to be found in a botanical manual or children's book. Although Foucault seems to think that words in pictures must "name", must in some way stand for something in the picture, in fact, I think, we countenance much looser and more various connections than this. As viewers of pictures we are modest in our demands: all we ask is that it be possible for us to understand why the artist has put these words or letters here, that there be some penetrable connection between word and image.

Carlyon Bay Hotel

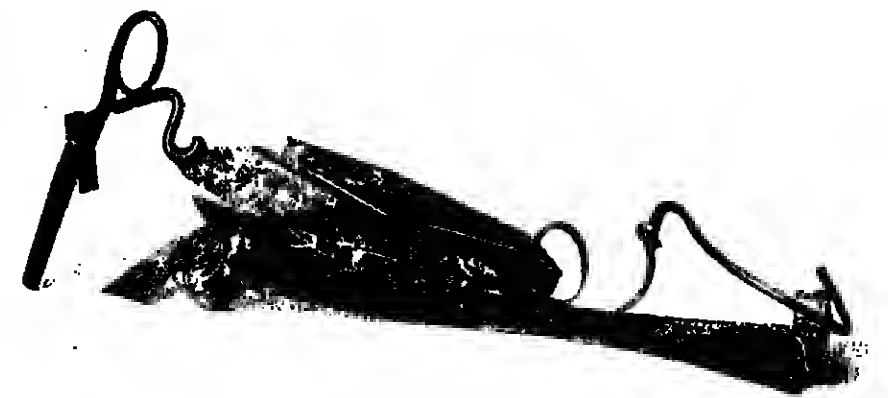
Designed for luxury, commandeered to house
Your bombed out school, under Spartan rule I live
In a Cornish idyll, with high and mighty views:
Royal blue channel, Phoenician fin-velned cliff.

Don't you know there's a war? It's why you're here
Debarred from girls, a pup among top dogs.
Home is ninety days off, and you've no future
Hunting hares over treacherous Irish bogs.

Wing-collared Milner scholar, don't forget
Your gas-mask, ration book, identity card:
My buckthorn wood heats inkblings in the black-out
Uncle Jack's killed in Africa. Work hard!

Your voice is breaking. Kneel, and be confirmed
By Truro's hands of clay. Do you feel transformed?

RICHARD MURPHY



"Writing piece 'Whence'" (1978) by Anthony Caro which is on show at the Serpentine Gallery in the exhibition Anthony Caro: Sculpture 1969-84 until May 28.

The object deified

Peter de Francia

MARK ROSENTHAL
Juan Gris
192pp, with colour and black-and-white
pictures. Abbeville Press, distributed by
Pandemic, 71 Great Russell Street, London
WC1B 3BN. £19.95.
089659 4009

Mark Rosenthal's study of Juan Gris, in which his admiration for and empathy with the artist's work clearly emerge, suffers from an unclear view of Gris's development as an artist, and for the reader this is not helped by the placing of most of the painter's statements and opinions in the chronological section of the book rather than in the text. Although Rosenthal questions John Golding's claim that Gris had "no real history" before he joined Picasso and Braque in Paris, Rosenthal produces virtually no evidence to support his view. The fact that Gris published satirical drawings in a Madrid magazine "imbued with the Art Nouveau spirit of mordant social criticism" and continued to make such drawings in Paris, and was an admirer of *Simplicissimus* offers little evidence of the ideas which were to motivate the development of his art. The only trace of satire which can be detected in his work is in the "Man in the Café" of 1912. The satirical drawings of 1908-11 be contributed to *Papin*, a Catalan magazine published in Barcelona, owe quite as much to the drawings of Forain as they do to Art Nouveau.

Whatever influence Gris's later contacts with both Maurice Raynal and Kahnweiler may have had, notably concerning ideas derived from Kantian aesthetics, his formative years in Madrid are likely to have exposed him

to the ideas of Karl Kraus, whose writings were translated into Spanish and were a determining influence on a whole generation of writers and intellectuals including Ortega y Gasset. But as it may, in 1915 Gris wrote in a letter to Kahnweiler that "he had not got an aesthetic, and this can only be acquired by experience". Perhaps this remark is central to the problem of his art. Gris sought to establish a theoretical basis for cubism. He could only achieve this through practice. Thus when contemplating a picture by Gris one is constantly reminded of Goethe's statement that "there is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory".

It is unclear whether Gris's procedure of isolating objects against a planar composition, referred to by Rosenthal as "object-painting", constitutes an equivalent of making "portraits of objects" as seems to be implied by Rosenthal. Léger's use of this idea had a specific intention, that of stressing, as he wrote, "the objective value which is undervalued when imprisoned within a subject". Gris to a large extent remained bound to his *subject*; the tradition of still-life painting. He was unable to reconcile the extreme clarity of his pictorial ideas and the deification of objects with the basically anti-idealistic tenets of Cubism. As a result, after 1920, it was increasingly difficult for him to make a clear distinction between the components within his paintings to which he wished to give significance and those which were allotted an ornamental role. A similar predicament is to be found in the sculpture of Gonzalez, who had lived in Paris since 1900 and whom Gris must have known — unaccountably he is not mentioned in the book.

The descriptions of individual paintings, while concise and objective, are sometimes bewildering, notably in matters relating to symbols. After stating that "symbols were anathema for Gris" and that "Gris and Raynal always attacked symbolism *per se*", Rosenthal analyses Gris's 1926 "Guitar and music paper", and aspects of "Le Canigou" (1921) are described as "stark and symbolical". Nor is it particularly easy to follow a mode of interpretation which posits the assumption that Gris's obsessive empathy with the objects of his still lifes has "direct implications for the surrealists" since "they too located objects in a poetic milieu". Vague as the notion of poetic milieu is, it is difficult to imagine any compatibility of milieu — poetic or otherwise — between the romanticized imagery of Dalí's "Persistence of memory", based on contrived pathological tansions, and any paintings of Gris, permeated as they are with a sense of imminence, completely devoid of stress, and for this reason, anti-romantic. Gris's work is closer to seventeenth-century Spanish Quietism, and it is regrettable that the one reference made to Zurbarán in the text concerns the use of a pictorial device in his painting of "Saint Serapion" and makes no mention of this perhaps vital link between the work of the two artists.

Fiction and metafiction

John Melmoth

JOHN COLLEE
Kingsley's Touch
206pp. Allon Lane. £6.95.
07139 1633 8
PETER HOYLE
The Man in the Iron Mask
159pp. Carcanet. £7.95.
085635 499 6

John Collee's literary debut, like so much hospital fiction, is an uncomfortable reminder that characters in novels are little more than envelopes of guts and organs, susceptible to an appalling range of ills. *Kingsley's Touch* stimulates anxiety in precisely the same way as browsing through a medical dictionary does: that inexplicable pain, that spot that refuses to heal may have chilling prognoses. In a flood of redivism, surgeons plunge up to their elbows in "o foul soup of clot and bowel content", labour long hours at "a dark, bloody hole". Collee's theme is cancer and he blows the polysyllable covers (osteogenic sarcoma, chondrosarcoma, phaeochromocytoma) that the big C assumes as it makes surreptitious inroads into bone, breast and bowel. The explicit dolings of doctors and nurses combine with a couple of grisly murders and a snatch of Indian mysticism in a story guaranteed to provoke the morbid curiosity of all but the most hopeless carcinophobe.

Alistair Kingsley, dour arch-rationalist, is the consultant surgeon at the Douglas Calder Hospital in Leith. Consequently, he is sceptical about the claims of Dr Danghi, his Indian pathologist, that the hospital is a replica of Nigambosh Ghat, a river temple in Rajasthan, and that Kingsley is an avatar, the Pandua (paleface) with the power to heal the sick, whose coming was predicted in the *Aharavaveda*. However, when Kingsley's wife develops cancer of the femur and is threatened with amputation at the hip, he begins to take the laying-on of hands more to heart. His apparent success in reversing the spread of malignancy creates problems of its own. He is pursued by the sick frantic for a cure, becomes isolated, retreats into a "carapace of responsibility, confusion and guilt". His self-regard takes a beating: his status is, he recognizes, a facelook of his mastery of an intellectual discipline. To think of himself as the uncomprehending ebanoid of an alien power is to confess himself a charlatan. Medical magic confers no prestige, rather it renders its chosen instrument an "executive, a technician". There is also Danghi's growing conviction that he must appease his gods with ritual slaughter and cadaver scoffing.

Kingsley's Touch suffers from its failure to commit itself finally to one genre. It performs an unflattering dissection of the upper surgical echelons. Casualty staff are depicted deriving "a big buzz out of major trauma", slipping into

novelistic stereotypes, tight-lipped and urgent, enjoying doing terrible things to people. On the other hand, Collee has few apparent qualms about going through the stylistic motions of the thriller: "his eyes bored into Kingsley like gimlets", "something exploded inside his skull". An original sociology of the consultant community shows worrying signs of terminal eliche.

The ideal reader of Peter Hoyle's first novel, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, would be a Mastermind contestant primed to answer questions on the D'Aragno romances of Dumas and Courtiz de Sandras. It is asking a lot that the unprepared be avid concerning the musketeer iconography of Douglas Fairbanks, *au fait* with the architecture of Fort Real, able to recall George Saintsbury's expressed opinion of Dumas's prose, deplore the "degeneracy of the Duke of Orloana" or itemize "the unnatural cruelties of Anne of Austria". The narrator who is in the process of re-reading *Le vicomte de Bragelonne*, paraphrases Rousseau to the effect "your peculiarities are not my peculiarities".

Life in Ruskin House is depressing and unglamorous. The inhabitants are made miserable by the incessant clatter of hooligan footballers, motor cyclists and barking dogs. The

narrator is firmly locked into his particular round of futility. On his own account, he has scarcely sufficient personality to resent the fact that his life has been spent "more or less continuously . . . beneath a minus sign". He has made a speciality of evasions, ignored challenges, unmastered knacks. It is to be expected that the arrival upstairs of a lunatic convinced that he is the masked prisoner, the unhappy twin of Louis XIV, should be a source of pleasure and relief. New neighbourliness consolidates a coincidence of wants. The barmy rocluse ("proud pariah") acquires a confidant, an underling, a compliant Saint-Mars, a manipulable goaler. The sitting tenant gains access to a complex, pre-fabricated fantasy, an imaginative topography. Both prefer the manners and morals of the seventeenth-century French court to those of a late twentieth-century housing estate.

Initially, our informant's admiration for the man upstairs is unqualified. He regards Rampick as an *aficionado* whose delusions are transcendently elegant, erudite and impervious to reality. However, as he schools himself in the madman's specialism, he starts to resent his loneliness. Spitefully, he attempts to prick the bubble but fails because he is un-

nable to make the world outside (explicitly "bodilamite") either credible or attractive. The narrator, frankly concerning his own quality, is oddly silent about his ambivalence: he is almost tonously besotted and enraged by the other's obsessions. D'Aragno is viewed as both macho, épée-wielding *chevalier* and as over-weight Gaseon, "a shrewd and brutish gigolo". Such impotent reservations find expression in the symbolic undercurrent of Rampick's pretensions. He pocks a king's livery in an Adg das bag and romks the chink of milk bottles, "immortally milk bottle", outside the "gar door".

The Man in the Iron Mask is a metafiction not just in the sense that it mauls the kind of writing that regards personality as synonymous with fine clothes and extravagant attitudes. Hoyle's raconteur is elegantly self-aware, Rampick's maimed perceptions have the polish and craft of a literary text. The prose is competent but indulges in prodigious vocabulary: umbratile, metachronism, propallat, apholotropic, anspasade. Narrative reliability is compromised as the distinctions between retainer and would-be prisoner are whimsically dismantled to the point at which the tenant ex-wife rovides him as "mask face".

Out the doll's house door

Mary Kathleen Benet

ELLEN SCHWAMM
How He Saved Her
266pp. Hutchinson. £8.95.
009 155540 X

Who is this year's fictional heroine? As good a candidate as any is a forty-year-old woman named Nora, living in Manhattan, who has believed all her life that you can't be too rich or too thin. What happens to her? It's obvious: her life turns out to be meaningless, her husband an oppressor, her search for liberation imperative. A lover duly appears, and under his influence all is changed.

No matter how many times the reader has been here before, it's worth repeating the visit to watch Ellen Schwamm turn banality into parable. Her New York Everywoman may be over-anxious about her sophistication, too ready to take style for substance, but stylish and witty and self-aware she undoubtedly is. Nobody could be more conscious of the limited sympathy she has the right to command. She and her charity-involved friends know all about the beggars starving in Somalia and India and Harlem. They know cancer victims and mugging victims. Nora, with her pretty children and her pretty apartment and her pretty clothes, has no problems at all except that she is living in a Gulag. Although she has everything, the price exacted for it is total com-

pliance. One awkward question, one movement of resistance, and the system crumbles.

What this novel explores with truculent finality is the cash basis of marriage. Having been sentimentally told by her husband at her fortieth birthday dinner that her price is far above rubles, Nora discovers that she is in fact valueless. Her domain – sensitivity, caring, family love – is worth, in her husband's monetary terms, exactly nothing, perhaps this should not surprise her quite as much as it does – after all, the news has been around for a long time now – but what could she have done about it? The facts of a life like hers are what they are, including disillusion. She cries, as the divorce arguments get down to brass tacks, "Just think of the deal you're getting! You've negotiated me down to nothing. . . . That should make you very bappy, it's the deal of a lifetime, it's worthy of you. I'm not costing you a penny. NOT ONE RED CENT!"

Before this stage is reached, however, we have the subtle and demonic entry of the Other Man. The flat realism of the family scenes gives way to an abstract and probing style that reaches beneath the surface of things. At first we are not sure whether this man Lautner really exists: wasn't Nora's need for him itself sufficient to call him into being? But he solidifies in a carefully orchestrated series of appearances as the rest of her life falls apart. If that life was as perfect as it seemed, Schwamm lightly suggests, then surely Lautner must be the devil. Certainly he casts Nora out of her sheltered

paradise and into the inferno of suburban shopping malls crowded with the overwrought damned; he forces her to live with unpleasant truths and even less pleasant uncertainties. In return, she gets the orgasm the story has promised her. Her children respect her again. Her husband is left deservedly alone to muller over his hoap of gold.

Nora does not really become independent. Exhausting and profitless as the war between the sexes might seem, this is her arena; to pretend anything else would be to condescend to her husband's opinion of her. Lautner's message is that love is worth the effort, when it is real love and not disguised hate. Is all this so more than a refreshing spiritual bath, the final icing on Nora's plummy cake? Well, no. She is going, and her most difficult task – and the one Schwamm deals with most convincingly – is to find an alternative to the "lodocency" of being an ageing plaything, an ageing pet. The happy ending is not really that she finds Lautner but that she finds dignity.

Schwamm has the sense to let her story tell only what it can tell. Because this woman has slammed out of her doll's house, that doesn't necessarily mean that no future woman will lock herself into one. Nora's redemption is not a revolution. There is a cruel system underlying the choices she makes, and while the system is there, the same choice will be made. The fictional terrain will therefore be visited again and again, but it may never be mapped more accurately.

Aching and longing

Linda Taylor

PENELOPE FARMER
Standing in the Shadow
176pp. Gollancz. £8.95.
0575 034033

ANABEL DONALD
Hannah At Thirty-Five
207pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £8.95.
0340 344415

There was a time when middle-class married ladies in their thirties behaved themselves and knew their place. Resignation was their key; fulfillment (not to mention happiness) was not an issue. They went to coffee mornings, gave dinner parties, had interesting hobbies. They read (and some wrote) novels – fantasies, romances, that sort of thing. But since the burning (or thereabouts), married complacency is a thing of the past; these women have begun to discover themselves. In their overly vibrant lives they are protagonists rather than sleeping partners.

Hannah and Ellie (Penelope Farmer's heroine) are both Oxford graduates (Hannah

even has a PhD), are clever, homo-counties housewives, living in London with the statutory two children – one of either sex. Class-wise, Hannah has the edge on Ellie, is a bit more upper-middle, has friends called Bibi and Carollee, Nicholas and Nigel. Hannah is also, at least initially, more eccentric: she married Brian, a Midlands, working-class, professional footballer; while Ellie's Peter is something dim in industrial relations.

Ellie, too, is dim; "for most of her life, had been like someone asleep under water". She does a bit of lino cutting, keeps a diary and is obsessed by her dead mother. Until, that is, she meets Clara – at a dinner party, of course; at that point, the lino-cutting becomes art (Clara and husband Edmund are artists); the diary is filled with yearning (for Clara), and the mother and father like a naughty daughter. Ellie has fallen into an emotional maelstrom: with Clara, her passionate, often cruel lover, with Edmund who fancies her, with jealous Peter, and with her fretful, neglected children. Not before time, Clara departs for France with her family. Ellie, distraught, leaves Peter, forgets her mother and becomes an illustrator.

of England (Heath's winter of discontent against the state of mind of Ellie, Penelope Farmer is the psychiatric social worker kind of novelist). And she lacks subtlety: "A cloud of melancholy enveloped her, the loss of Clara body imposed its full weight and significance on her heart. She thought she had ached and longed before; but she had never ached and longed like this." It is at moments like this that female fulfillment seems a very bad idea.

In *Hannah at Thirty-Five*, Anabel Donald morosely avoids the soul-searching intensity that is Penelope Farmer's forte. Donald's heroine is a generally sharp about her characters. She is good on bodies, for instance: the women are either sagging or anorexically streamlined, men manicured and spindly. With Brian, now to a fooler, richer, smarter and more common, Marjorie, the ovel deals with a year in the nash's life in which she finds the right man. Marjorie, the ovel deals with a year in the nash's life in which she finds the right man. Marjorie, the ovel deals with a year in the nash's life in which she finds the right man. Marjorie, the ovel deals with a year in the nash's life in which she finds the right man.

Encounters in Rangoon

Dennis J. Duncanson

HUGH TINKER (Editor)
Burma: The Struggle for Independence 1944-1948
Volume 1, From Military Occupation to civil government 1 January 1944 to 31 August 1946
1078pp. HMSO. £95.
0115800891

What turned out to be a mistaken belief seems to have underlain the British campaign to evict the Japanese from Burma in 1944 and 1945: it was that Japan could and ought to be defeated on the mainland of Asia, even if it meant taking political risks for the remote future by arming political subversives behind the Japanese lines. Right up to the moment when the atom bombs actually finished the fighting, four months after Rangoon had been recaptured, priority in British relations with Burma was still being given to a "war effort" that events were about to render superfluous – the effort first to liberate the rest of Burmese territory and thereafter to use it (though not its "antifascist forces" as those forces' leaders would have liked [doc 181]) as a base for seaborne operations ("Zipper") to reconquer Malaya and Indonesia (due 88). The "calculated risks" duly materialized as calculated. The British plan for the post-war restoration of Burma – that is, swift rebuilding of the wrecked economic infrastructure and resumption of the programme, already for advanced under the 1937 Constitution, for orderly transition to Dominion status, with the right of secession from the Commonwealth – had to be abandoned. Stafford Cripps's warning, delivered in the House of Commons on June 1, 1945 – "I counsel my Burmese friends, and the people of Burma, to exercise patience, for we do not want to see in Burma, or in any other country, the rapid setting of power by any particular group of people, in order to improve some form of government" – turned out to be prophetic. Burma had until 1937 been governed as a fief of Britain's Indian Empire, and in the aftermath of the Raj, Independence had to be paid for in blood, Burman against Burman.

Historical interpretation of this kind has no place in *Burma: The Struggle for Independence 1944-1948*: like the twelve volumes of *The Transfer of Power in India* which it is planned to supplement, it is a source-book facilitating others' interpretations but not proffering any to itself. The documents comprise a selection of records from the old Burma Office (now housed in the India Office Library) relating to constitutional advance between the loss of Rangoon early in 1942 and the arrival there of the last Governor, Sir Hubert Rance, in August 1946; a second volume will carry the collection on to Independence on January 4, 1948. Some documents have been added from the War Office (now PRO) files on the military administration in Burma (1943-45), others

from private collections now likewise housed at the PRO, the India Office, or, in the case of Mountbatten's copious semi-official correspondence, at Broadlands; the May 1945 White Paper on Burma (Cmd 6635) is also reproduced.

Before Hugh Tinker began the enterprise, seven or eight individuals who had played a prominent part at Rangoon were invited to compose a memoir of their experiences; extracts from six of those have been included, though Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith (Governor-in-name continuously from 1941 to 1946) regrettably died before undertaking the task. The whole work is edited and produced to the standards of perfection we are accustomed to from both this editor and the Stationery Office, and things are made easier for the user by means of a full but succinct historical introduction, a summary of contents document by document, a table of dates, biographical notes, a glossary of terms of art, and an index. The documents are printed in strictly chronological order, but the summary of contents is topical, and there are other thoughtful cross-references at every convenient point. The editor's choice of documents cannot be judged with certainty without reference to the original files; but, as Professor Tinker points out, those are all open to researchers.

The story these papers tell is a drama with three leading actors: the Governor, Dorman-Smith, the revolutionary, Aung San, and the Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia, Lord Louis Mountbatten. Was "Reggie" the blimp "Diekie" took him for and therefore culpable in alienating Aung San whom timely concessions would have made amenable? Certainly, Dorman-Smith (a former MP and without previous experience of Burmese or the administration of dependent territories) was committed to the gradual devolution envisaged by the 1937 Constitution. Like Cripps, he was reluctant to skimp basic reconstruction for the sake of opposing native impotence following the false, universally discredited dawn of "Independence-within-co-prosperity" which the Japanese had purported to confer on Burmas. While he was at Simla, sitting out the Japanese occupation, his position was difficult: he had had to watch while jurisdiction in reconquered districts of Burma, when not usurped by Chinese and American generals, was exercised by civil-affairs officers answerable to Mountbatten. Dorman-Smith's character was undoubtedly vacillating, and remained so when at last he was allowed to resume the government in October 1945; after only seven or eight months back in control, afflicted by amebiasis, he finally experienced Atlee and was early recalled to London.

Mountbatten's talents were soon redirected to the battle of Nebru and Jinoah, but, as doubt feeding that events in Rangoon were bearing him out, he continued to express his views to Dorman-Smith's successor, Hubert Rance, who had headed the military administration under him and remained deferential to him. Yet the enlightened attitude towards subject peoples which Mountbatten gave the impression of priding himself on rested explicitly upon a shaky belief that Aung San and his comrades were men of the stamp of Smuts and Botha at the end of the Boer War, and implicitly on what used to be known as "Lex Wellington" – the supremacy of commanders-in-chief which included the right to help native parties instal themselves in power. (To a man, American generals of the time shared that view of themselves.) Despite having been rebuked by the Chiefs of Staff, in effect for not heeding Cripps's warning about Burma (they had occasion to remove him again a little later for his similar attitude over southern Indochina, also under his command), Mountbatten set his tone with his senior civil-affairs officers at first encounter of Rangoon by brandishing his powers of court-martial against any of them who dared "sabotage" his policy (the one he was rebuked for). It came out that he had omitted to tell them previously what it was (doc 203).

Mountbatten's policy had practical support from Force 136 (SOE), one of whose duties was (in collaboration or empetition with the US Office of Strategic Services) to hand out arms to likely Southeast Asian guerrillas in the expectation that guerrilla operations, if not decisive, were going to speed the defeat of Japan and that the guerrillas' interest in them would stop there. Perhaps the most revealing of the personal memoirs in *Burma* is that by F.S.V. Donnison, a pre-war district administrator destined to become the historian of the Burmese public service as well as principal official historian of British military government, but at this time successively district officer, civil-affairs officer, and finally Chief Secretary; he laments the signs of Force 136's incaution in putting weapons in the hands of "dacoits" bent at times on theft, at times on mass mobilization by intimidation on behalf of the Japanese-formed Burma National Army now turned Aot-Fascist People's Freedom League. The organization's secretary-general was Aung San. Civil-affairs protests were overridden when Force 136 appealed direct to Mountbatten (docs 95-6); and Dorman-Smith's woes were made worse by the endorsing of the AFPFL in a position to dominate much of the countryside to the detriment of other parties willing to cooperate in orderly constitutional devolution.

Without access to the files of SOE (unpublished and perhaps burnt by now), there is no knowing whether Aung San or others of the AFPFL leadership were in touch with the international communist movement in 1945. During the 1920s and 30s, the Comintern had ignored Burma, probably believing it to be merely a province of India; Indian communists had converted a few students in Rangoon or London, but none seems to have been to Moscow for the *cheirothesia* as Toilers of the East essential to qualify for Stalin's patronage. And yet Aung San had organized the "nationalist" AFPFL, with the deserting BNA puppets of the Japanese, round a typical Leninist "central committee" nucleus. His colleague Than Tun (like him, a converted, though possibly not a subverted, communist) – at the same time as he sent Mountbatten through Force 136 a promise of AFPFL collaboration including an expeditionary force for Zipper and "encouragement" of the masses to grow rice badly needed in neighbouring countries (doc 179) – was secretly issuing to the BNA officers an explanation of the collaboration as *regular pair mieu samter* towards a "second-stage revolution" and exhorting them to concentrate on political indoctrination of their men in preference to giving them military training (doc 181). It is a measure of Mountbatten's ingenueness, by comparison with Cripps's realism, that he banned as "prejudicial" the use of the phrase "revolutionary activity" from military reports on the AFPFL (doc 204). Tinker's documents make it harder to condemn the Supreme Commander's American counterpart in the China Theater, Wedemeyer, for letting the OSS help the Chi Minh seize power at Hanoi by the same method.

Those dutifully toned-down reports by the district administration might still have indicated the means, coercive or persuasive, that the AFPFL used for bringing peasants under their discipline, but lack of space has prevented the editor from including any of them. (He judges them "one-sided" anyway, though it could be that they are truthful about facts that were actually all discreditable to the AFPFL.) Than Tun admitted (doc 181) that, in May 1945, Burmese opinion increasingly welcomed the return of temporary British-protected rule. Yet Donnison in his memoir laments that twelve months later the AFPFL ruled in the villages and had gained virtual command over the rapacious civil service, so that they could call, and then call off with equal discipline, a police strike in mid-1946 over badly-lagging pay scales, whose occurrence Donnison reckoned marked the real end of the Raj in Burma, on the eve of Rance's assumption of office. One factor in the triumph of Aung San over his rivals must surely have been the fact that the Rangoon authorities had at their disposal press and broadcasting services evidently designed only to cope with critics in Britain, not revolutionaries inside Burma. Depressed by his own political analysis, Donnison resigned in despair as Rance arrived, unaware how impatient he too would find himself. Sixteen months later, precipitate independence plunged Burma into strife again, Aung San's assassination in June 1947 deprived him of personal triumph, so we cannot tell whether he would have turned out a Nehru or a Lenin. But the detail of those wretched last stages will provide the contents for Volume 2 of *Burma*.

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Autocratic communalism

Michael Richards

DERYCK SCARR (Editor)
Fiji: The three-legged stool
Selected writings of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna
528pp. Macmillan. £8.50.
0333 340531
DERYCK SCARR
Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, statesman, man of two worlds
220pp. Macmillan. £5.95.
0333 340692

It is only right that Englishmen should read over us, because it was to their Great Queen our Chiefs owed these islands. . . . An Englishman is easy to offend. His cooking is fresh and his clothes are always neat. He picks up his language quickly enough, though he frequently speaks as if he owned it. The speaker was Ratu Lala Sukuna, to a European audience in Suva, in 1938. In 1943 he was appointed Fiji's Advisor on Native Affairs: recognition that he was the key intermediary between Fijians and Europeans in the middle years of this century. Whether his role was that of colonial collaborator or valiant defender of Fijian freedom must be left to the historians of Melanesia to judge, but the personality of this

dignified, articulate administrator is well conveyed in these two books.

Ratu Sukuna was born an aristocrat, part inheritor of an ancient tradition of power, confirmed by indirect rule. His father found an Oxford graduate to tutor him, then schooled him in New Zealand; in 1907 he went into the Fijian Administration, and in 1913 came to Oxford to read law. From there it was a short step to the tranches – but with the Foreign Legion, for there was no place for him in the British Army. He won the Croix de Guerre in 1916: "the night of blood causes pain in the stomach and sometimes it is difficult to stop vomiting" he wrote home, but he deeply resented his and Fiji's rejection. In the 1920s he began his life's work, compiling the compendium of what amounted to a Fijian Domesday book, by way of which both traditional Fijian society and its land must be precisely mapped. Deryck Scarr makes it clear that he used the power this gave him for his own ends: both biographer and Sukuna's own reports in *The Three-legged stool* show that chief of these was the creation of strong barriers against the alienation of Fijian land.

Sukuna recognized that the social model he sought to preserve had to be rooted in the

existence: that the patriarchal society founded on contiguity and status, the "rigid autocracy based on an austere communalism of property" that he saw as the natural order for Fijians, had resulted in part from a past full of violence. But within that order he saw individual assuredness and security, the only possible source of the strength Fijians would need if they were to survive the two-edged colonialism of foreign trader and Indian migrant. Democracy threatened a future of ignorance and prejudice. Not all Fijians agreed; he was ruthless in his advice on the killing of his rival, the champion Apolosi Nawai, and since independence in 1970 many Fijians have opted out of the communal system to become independent farmers. Scarr's biography does not fully explore the question of how responsible Sukuna himself was for the maintenance after 1945 of the policies of social conservatism first adopted in 1874, although he allows that voices in the Colonial Office were increasingly critical of Sukuna in the 1950s. At bottom, Scarr suggests, the British simply lacked any faith in a future for Fijians.

This rambling, awkward biography works as a compendium of the sometimes lyrical, but usually factual, diary entries and letters

that speak for Sukuna. It is difficult to read: too often one is plunged into a cyclonic surge of Fijian history and genealogy, without much by way of introduction to the society Ratu Sukuna represented, let alone to those of Indians or Europeans in Fiji. Put together, the two books create a rewarding, albeit idiosyncratic, memorial. When other people are allowed to appear Scarr tells some splendid stories. Witness a scene on board ship: Ratu Sir Edward Tuivunavou Cakobu, after an overbearing neighbour's discussion of cannibalism, waving aside the menu at dinner and calling for the passenger list.

The fifteenth edition of *The Far East and Australasia 1983-84* (912pp. Europa Publications Ltd. £50. 0903 118 89 8), an annual survey containing detailed information about all the countries in the Far Eastern and Australasian region, was published at the end of last year. A separate chapter is devoted to each country and information is given on its physical and social geography, its history and economy, a statistical survey, a summary of the constitutional and descriptions of the judicial and educational systems. A bibliography is included for each country.

